

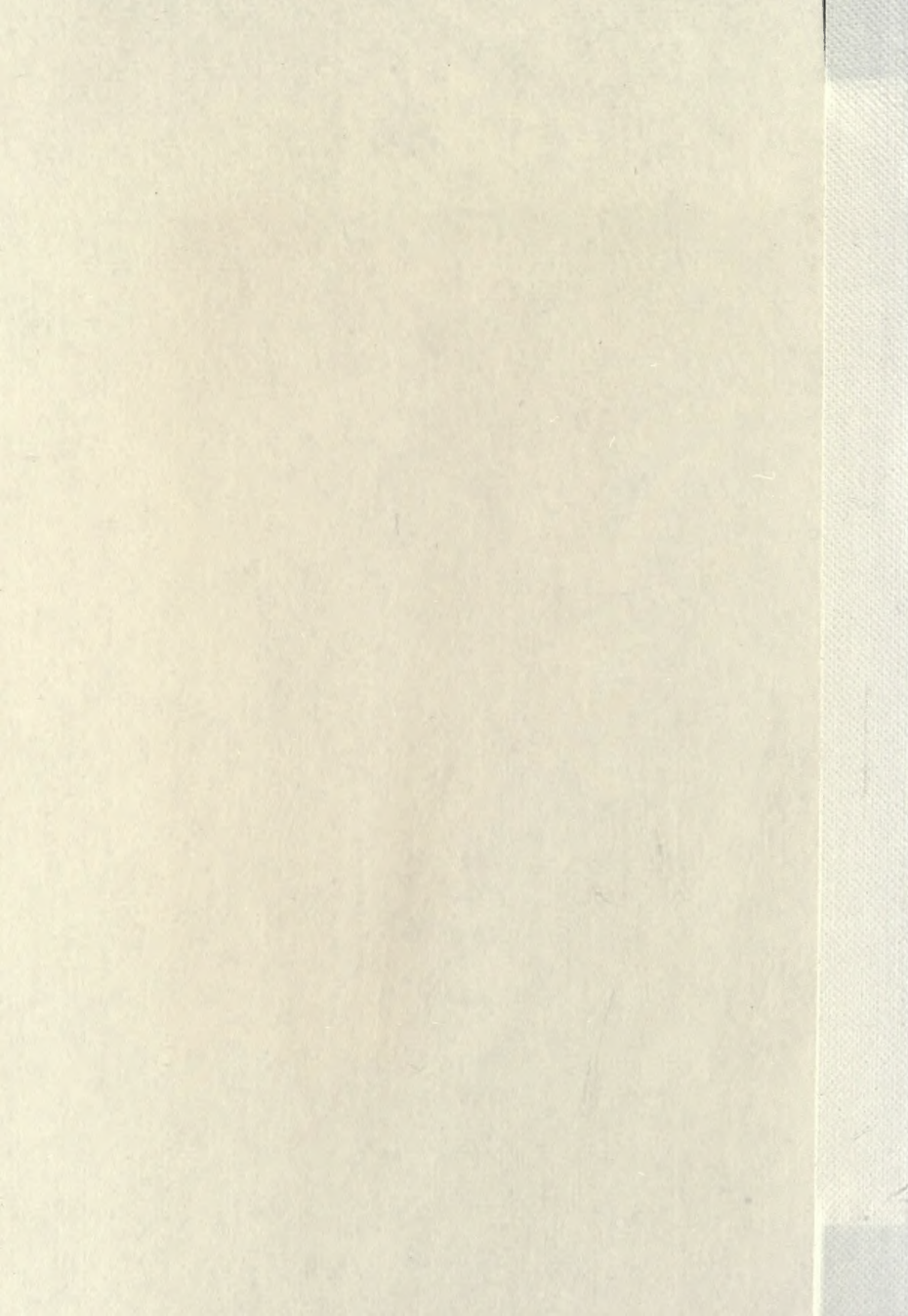
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Pope and his poetry

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POETRY & LIFE

POPE & HIS POETRY

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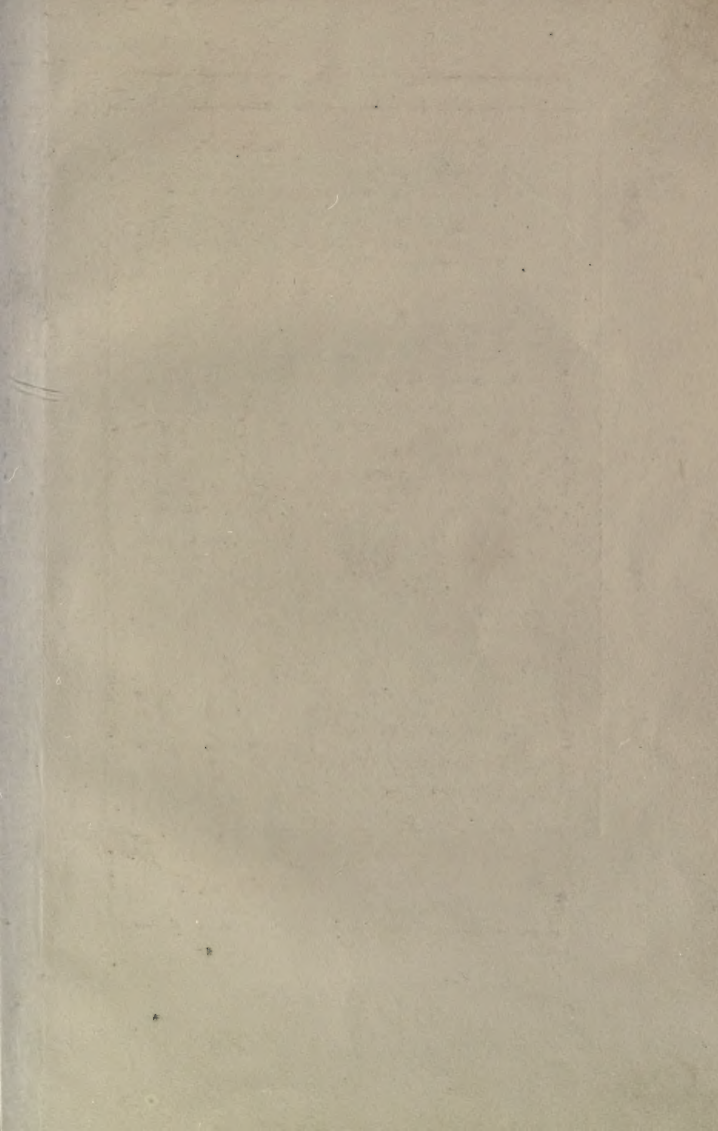




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Alexander Pope

POPE AND HIS POETRY

Edward William
BY

E. W. EDMUNDS M.A.

Author of "Shelley and His Poetry"
"Chaucer and His Poetry"



LONDON: GEORGE G.
HARRAP & CO. LTD.
2 & 3 PORTSMOUTH STREET
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SPOTTISWOODE, BALLANTYNE & CO. LTD.
Colchester, London & Eton, England

GENERAL PREFACE

A GLANCE through the pages of this little book will suffice to disclose the general plan of the series of which it forms a part. Only a few words of explanation, therefore, will be necessary.

The point of departure is the undeniable fact that with the vast majority of young students of literature a living interest in the work of any poet can best be aroused, and an intelligent appreciation of it secured, when it is immediately associated with the character and career of the poet himself. The cases are indeed few and far between in which much fresh light will not be thrown upon a poem by some knowledge of the personality of the writer, while it will often be found that the most direct—perhaps even the only—way to the heart of its meaning lies through a consideration of the circumstances in which it had its birth. The purely æsthetic critic may possibly object that a poem should be regarded simply as a self-contained and detached piece of art, having no personal affiliations or bearings. Of the validity of this as an abstract principle nothing need now be said. The fact remains that, in the earlier stages of study at any rate, poetry is most valued and loved when it is made to seem most human and vital; and the human and vital interest of poetry can be most surely brought home to the reader by the biographical method of interpretation.

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This is to some extent recognised by writers of histories and text-books of literature, and by editors of selections from the works of our poets ; for place is always given by them to a certain amount of biographical material. But in the histories and text-books the biography of a given writer stands by itself, and his work has to be sought elsewhere, the student being left to make the connection for himself ; while even in our current editions of selections there is little systematic attempt to link biography, step by step, with production.

This brings us at once to the chief purpose of the present series. In this, biography and production will be considered together and in intimate association. In other words, an endeavour will be made to interest the reader in the lives and personalities of the poets dealt with, and at the same time to use biography as an introduction and key to their writings.

Each volume will therefore contain the life-story of the poet who forms its subject. In this attention will be specially directed to his personality as it expressed itself in his poetry, and to the influences and conditions which counted most as formative factors in the growth of his genius. This biographical study will be used as a setting for a selection, as large as space will permit, of his representative poems. Such poems, where possible, will be reproduced in full, and care will be taken to bring out their connection with his character, his circumstances, and the movement of his mind. Then, in

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addition, so much more general literary criticism will be incorporated as may seem to be needed to supplement the biographical material, and to exhibit both the essential qualities and the historical importance of his work.

It is believed that the plan thus pursued is substantially in the nature of a new departure, and that the volumes of this series, constituting as they will an introduction to the study of some of our greatest poets, will be found useful to teachers and students of literature, and no less to the general lover of English poetry.

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

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POPE AND HIS POETRY

THE works of Alexander Pope have given rise to a more varied criticism than those perhaps of any other poet. By some he has been placed near the level of Shakespeare and Milton, as one of our master-poets ; there are others who would deny him altogether, or allow him only grudgingly, the title of poet. Byron admired as much as Wordsworth and Coleridge depreciated him. Matthew Arnold bracketed him with Dryden as " classics of our prose " : to Professor Courthope, who has done much to restore Pope to the higher rank, such a statement is an almost absurd heresy. To which side does the real truth incline ? Are we justified in including Pope in this series of books ? The extracts in the following pages will enable every reader to judge for himself. It is only necessary to say here that, whether we *name* Pope's work poetry or prose, it is certain that it has qualities which demand our greatest respect and give us a genuine if somewhat alloyed pleasure:

Before, however, we can intervene in the controversy about Pope's title to the poet's laurels, we ought to have some idea of what we mean by poetry, as distinct from prose. For it is very largely the varied form of this idea that is responsible for the diversity in the criticism of

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Pope. If a great poet means a great writer of verse, then Pope is beyond all question a very great poet. If, in Pope's own words,

True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd ;

if, that is, the poet's aim is the expression of generally recognized truths in a final and memorable manner, then again Pope must be placed very high indeed. Probably no poet with the exception of Shakespeare has enriched our language so much with quotable and readily remembered sayings. "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread" is one example of his numerous aphorisms, coined with such final force as to have the accent of proverbs. In the making of verses in the particular metre which he cultivated Pope could scarcely be excelled. His heroic couplets, often his single lines, have a lucidity, a strength, a wit, an aptness, that cannot be gainsaid.

But is this all that we ask of a poet ? Are these qualities of clearness and precision, of balance and cleverness, of witty phrase and ready epigram, poetic qualities ? No reader of Pope will deny that they are precisely the qualities demanded by his subject-matter. The question thus reduces itself to this : is Pope's subject-matter really suitable for poetic treatment ? His treatment is adequate and appropriate to it ; he has achieved what he aimed at : was this aim poetical ?

We shall see in the course of our review that

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Pope's poems are either didactic, or ethical, or satirical. That is to say, they are either, as in the "Essay on Criticism," a kind of treatise in verse; or a versified discussion of ethical or philosophical problems, like the "Essay on Man"; or a satirical treatment of certain phases of human nature through special examples, as in "The Dunciad." Now, on first thoughts, we should say that prose was the most suitable vehicle of such studies. Literary criticism, ethical philosophy, moral satire—surely these themes will demand in the first instance the scientific method, uncoloured by the heightening processes of imagination which are the special features of the poetic method. Calm and lucid analysis of the facts by the reason, without any appeal to our sympathies or antipathies, would seem to be the first requisite of such work. Does Pope give us this? Does he give us no more than this? It must be confessed that he had most difficult material to forge into poetry; it does not follow that he has not succeeded in his difficult task. Lucretius and Horace remind us that it had been done before him, and therefore that it was not impossible. Let us therefore get rid of prejudices and prepossessions about Pope. He is neither a Shakespeare nor a Milton; neither in style nor in matter does he approach their grandeur and breadth, their insistent appeal to our highest imaginative faculties. Epic and drama are the grandest forms of poetry, and Pope unaided could aspire to neither of these realms. Nor can

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he be named a lyric poet in any sense. But if on his lower plane he has achieved his results rather by the spring of his imagination than by the careful and plodding processes of intellectual analysis, he must be placed in the same category as Shakespeare ; if we find in him any of that shaping and creative faculty that went so obviously to the making of "Hamlet" or "Paradise Lost," that insight into eternal truths, that power of capturing in melody or metaphor some strain of the harmony of the universe, then he is entitled to the rank of Poet. This mysterious power of capturing the souls of men may in Pope be obscured by other qualities, may be present only here and there in his verses ; every reader will be able to judge for himself whether it exists or not, whether, for example, the "Essay on Man" is something more enduring and more valuable than a piece of philosophical argument. Whatever decision we come to on this point, however, few competent readers will fail to find in Pope, almost everywhere, something to admire, something to sharpen their intellects, some evidence of an unmatched skill in the use of words. The mind will be entertained and delighted, even though the heart may be starved.

The prejudice against Pope is deepened by, even if it is not the result of, the fact that his personal character was by no means of the noblest. He was, as we shall see, capable of the meanest actions : paltry jealousies and suspicions, underhand dealings and downright

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lying, petty spites and bitter revenges. He was sickly in body and in spirit, vain, irritable, domineering. He was a deformed valetudinarian; and, while his enemies made coarse play of his infirmity, his nature became a festering sore of rancour and suspicion. From this arose the venom that galls us so often in his satires. Could such a man as this, we are prone to ask, be a great poet? Could we expect from such a nature the broad beneficence and large humanity of a Shakespeare, or the high-souled grandeur of a Milton's conceptions? We could not expect it, and we do not get it. We find too much in Pope that is dominated by merely personal considerations. The littleness of the man meets us too often for us to doubt its reality as a part of his nature. But it is only a part. There is an obverse side to the unpleasing personality that we have suggested.

Pope was an enthusiast for literature; he loved all that was good in the literature of the past, and was a keen critic of the products of the present. To his own work he gave infinite pains, and did all that he could do to make it perfect. He made literature into a dignified profession, independent and inferior to no other. To see it prostituted by hireling pens to the basest uses, to the manufacture of political scurrility or irresponsible lampoon, was for him the most acute torture; and if personal hostility set afoot his satires, we shall also find that a high and genuine indignation is their more abiding inspiration. There was in Pope, in

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short, something above the peevish invalid whom the world saw and knew. He was not unconscious of the meanness of his weapons, but he justified himself by the fact that he was using them to clear out an abominable moral plague. This may be pleaded as at least a partial atonement for his bitterness ; and we may extend the plea by the further remark that very few of his victims did not deserve the castigations he gave them. In a burst of indignation, in his " Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot " (1735), which is his own valuable defence of his methods, he exclaims :

✓ Curst be the verse, how well soe'er it flow,
That tends to make one worthy man my foe.

And, later in the same poem, he declares :

✓ A lash like mine no honest man shall dread,
But all such babbling blockheads in his stead.

Again, Pope was not a cloistered poet, cherishing great dreams in obscurity and finding in his art its own reward. He was a poet of the town, the interpreter or commentator of everyday life. Like Addison he brought culture from the garret of the philosopher to the club, the drawing-room, the common haunts of educated men. Poetry became the fashion ; and it was Pope's deliberate determination to keep the standard high, both in form and in substance. In order to do this—in order to lead the taste of his public away from whatever was vapid in matter or slovenly in style—he must needs expose the

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weaknesses of a large tribe of fulsome and pretentious scribblers, most of whom were, generally on literary grounds, his personal foes. In the face of inveterate and lifelong hostility, in defiance of his own defects of health and of temperament, he succeeded in establishing as the "correct" style a poetic diction from which all looseness, all inexactness, all meretricious ornament and all slipshod habits of thought were purged ~~away~~. And this was no mean accomplishment. It was a piece of very necessary "spadework" in the development of our literature, which did not indeed yield us the finest flowers of poetry nor foster the growth of the finest faculties of the poet himself, but which cannot be disregarded by thoughtful students without serious loss.

As a final apology for Pope, it is only fair to add that his positive virtues were numerous. He was, for example, a model son to his father, and the devoted son of a mother who lived to a great age dependent on his attentions. While he was ready to quarrel with the Grub Street minnows, he never truckled to the rich or to the powerful.

A knave's a knave to me in every state,

he proudly and justly boasts ; and though he might by a little subservience have gained both place and pension for himself, he never abandoned his unpopular religion or shed the sting from a line of his satire. The following passage from the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" is not an

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unfair description of his character and aims ; it teaches us at any rate the light in which he saw himself.

Not Fortune's worshipper, nor fashion's fool,
Not Lucre's madman, nor Ambition's tool,
Not proud, nor servile ;—be one Poet's praise,
 That, if he pleas'd, he pleas'd by manly ways :
 That Flatt'ry, ev'n to Kings, he held a shame,
 And thought a Lie in verse or prose the same.
 That not in Fancy's maze he wander'd long,
 But stoop'd to Truth, and moraliz'd his song :
That not for Fame, but Virtue's better end,
 He stood the furious foe, the timid friend
 The damning critic, half approving wit,
 The coxcomb hit, or fearing to be hit ;
 Laugh'd at the loss of friends he never had,
 The dull, the proud, the wicked, and the mad ;
 The distant threats of vengeance on his head,
 The blow unfelt, the tear he never shed ;
 The tale reviv'd, the lie so oft o'erthrown,
 Th' imputed trash, and dulness not his own ;
 The morals blacken'd when the writings scape,
 The libell'd person, and the pictur'd shape ;
 Abuse, on all he lov'd, or lov'd him, spread,
 A friend in exile, or a father, dead ;
 The whisper, that to greatness still too near,
 Perhaps, yet vibrates on his Sov'reign's ear :—
 Welcome for thee, fair *Virtue* ! all the past ;
 For thee, fair *Virtue* ! welcome ev'n the *last* !

Alexander Pope was born in the year of our English Revolution, 1688. His father was a Roman Catholic merchant, and in a Catholic atmosphere the poet's early life was spent. What that meant we may learn if we consult

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history. For our excellent revolution, though it did not bring any notable persecution of the Catholics, certainly placed them in an inferior position in the realm, locking against them every public position and profession of emolument or dignity, and holding over their heads severe penal laws, ready to be put into force if political circumstances called for it. The result was that though the poet's father became a successful man of business, he was perforce bound to live without ostentation and without many of an Englishman's privileges.

It has often been suggested that Pope's habit of intrigue and duplicity in his common dealings was the result of the atmosphere of mystery and subterfuge in which a Catholic household was enveloped. However this may be, it is certain that the young Pope was deprived by the family religion of the advantages of a regular education. The public schools were closed against him ; and after two or three attempts in private schools he came home at the age of twelve, and henceforward enjoyed no systematic tuition, but, with a little assistance from a Catholic priest named Southcote, educated himself by the desultory process of devouring all the literature he could lay his hands upon. Hence it was that, throughout his life, he knew much of many things, but never became a sound or finished scholar.

Pope was born in Lombard Street, London ; but soon after his birth his father retired to Binfield, a quiet rustic spot on the border of

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Windsor Forest. It is remarkable that, spending his youth amid such surroundings, Pope never gained anything from Nature—neither the faculty of observation nor the habit of philosophic meditation. The woods, the lanes and the rivers never inspired a line of his verse; his whole attitude to Nature was artificial: his references to natural facts and scenery are second-hand, and very far removed, not merely from the lofty meditative flights of a Wordsworth, but equally from the painstaking accuracy of a Thomson. With every advantage that a beautiful environment could afford, Pope was from first to last a poet of the town, admired in the drawing-room and the literary club, but having no message for the mystic or the recluse.

Perhaps his health had much to do with this. He was deformed from his birth, and was thus precluded from all ~~violent~~ sports; the only exercise he could take was a little gardening, which, in accordance with the fashion of the time, he cultivated as a hobby through his life. His digestion was weak, and he suffered from severe headaches. Since from his very earliest years he showed a precocious gift for learning and an extraordinary faculty for composition, he was thus thrown upon books rather than upon the open air for companionship in his solitude. He found nothing in Nature, in literature everything.

The want of a careful education affected every step of Pope's later literary career. Yet, though he lacked the discipline and exactitude of the scholar, he went into severe training for the

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contests which led to his literary fame. No man ever worked more zealously at poetry than did Pope; some of his earliest exercises have a perfection of form in many of their couplets such as only the utmost care in composition could have given. Some of the best of his juvenile lines might easily be mistaken for mature work, so easy is their flow, so crisply is their meaning expressed. Quite early in his life Pope made up his mind to be a poet :

As yet a child, nor yet a fool for fame,
I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came,

he wrote in his "Epistle to Arbuthnot"; and he had written many hundreds of verses before he was twenty. His natural gift was perfected by assiduous practice throughout his boyhood years.

His self-guided reading was wide, if desultory. He became well acquainted with the writings of the best of his predecessors, especially with Spenser and Dryden. He read Latin and French, and possibly Italian: Ovid, Virgil, Statius, Boileau, Ariosto and Tasso were all more or less familiar to him. Homer, who was to play so large a part in his later career, he had managed to read with the aid of a translation. Prose writers did not attract him, though he had read some works on criticism with profit; a weighty theme like Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding" he had neither the patience nor the ability to master. What evolved from this large mass of reading was a mind shallow but acute, full of general literary knowledge of an

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was recd. from
inexact sort, but with clear ideas of what poetry ought to be. In the attainment of the latter, Dryden's work had been the most influential. He himself admitted with enthusiastic respect that he had learnt versification wholly from Dryden ; a glimpse of the older poet at Will's coffee-house was one of his most treasured boyhood memories ; and this just hero-worship must fairly be remembered to Pope's credit.

Apart from his studies and abilities, Pope found a few useful friends and admirers in his early years, who gave him useful criticism and encouragement. Among them was a retired diplomatist named Trumbull, who was a keen student of Milton and the classics ; William Walsh, a Worcestershire squire, who had both reputation and influence as a critic ; and William Wycherley, the dramatist, then an old man whose work was done, but who had still a sort of reputation to live upon. Wycherley sent his poems to the youthful Pope, and a correspondence passed between them, which has been partly preserved, though in a form afterwards doctored by Pope. More intimate friends were John Caryl, a Sussex gentleman, who kept Pope's letters and left them behind to be discovered as the most damning evidence against the poet's character ; and the sisters Martha and Teresa Blount, daughters of a Catholic gentleman who lived not far from the home of the Popes. All these friends were valuable to the poet ; but his early works were the sufficient advertisement of his genius, and unaided by

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patronage brought him into the full light of fame.

Pope's readings in the great poets stimulated him to imitation and translation, which afforded him the necessary practice in the technical side of his art—practice never followed out more assiduously. He translated favourite passages of Virgil, Ovid and Homer, and a great deal of Statius, while still a boy, developing the habit of pruning and polishing which accounts for the perfection of his later achievements. He planned and wrote a great deal of an ambitious epic before he was sixteen ; a few of the couplets he used for the " Essay on Criticism," but reluctantly destroyed the rest in later years. By the year 1705 he had written his " Pastorals," inspired mainly by Virgil. His friend Sir William Trumbull praised them highly, declaring that Milton had done nothing so promising at the age of seventeen ; and Walsh, from the point of view of a critic of reputation, was almost as encouraging. He it was who impressed upon Pope the duty of following the ancients and writing " correctly." With the backing of such men, Pope's " Pastorals " were circulated among competent people, and presently were published in a miscellany issued by a bookseller named Tonson (1708).

The " Pastorals " are to our taste frigid and artificial work. They reveal neither the love of nature nor the sincerity or simplicity that make such poems tolerable. The parallel passages appended to them, from Virgil and Theocritus,

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show that the poet was proud rather of his success as an imitator than of his originality. The descriptions of nature never suggest Binfield for a moment, any more than the swains and nymphs suggest real men and women. Such merits as they had, however, the wits were quick to recognize ; and these were the merits that most appealed to the taste of the time. They lay chiefly in the ease and smoothness of the versification ; apart from a few imperfect rhymes, they gave promise of a masterly control of metre, hardly second to Dryden's ; they foreshadowed that great man's successor in the kingship of literature.

Contemporary with the "Pastorals" was the first part of the descriptive poem entitled "Windsor Forest," which was not completed and published till 1713. Suggested by Sir John Denham's "Cooper's Hill," this poem is superior to the "Pastorals." It touches upon many themes in a pleasant way, and it has at least the interest of variety. But again the elaborate descriptions are chiefly fine flourishes of words, cleverly managed ; they have no fresh or original colour, no sense of the picturesque ; they are a clever youth's borrowed rhetoric, the apt adaptation of ancient language to new needs. We give a few lines which will show at once the strength and the limitations of the precocious poet, and will serve as a good example of his boyish work.

The Groves of Eden, vanish'd now so long,
Live in description, and look green in song :

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These, were my breast inspir'd with equal flame,
Like them in beauty, should be like in fame.
Here hills and vales, the woodland and the plain,
Here earth and water seem to strive again ;
Not Chaos-like together crush'd and bruis'd,
But, as the world, harmoniously confus'd :
Where order in variety we see,
And where, tho' all things differ, all agree.
Here waving groves a chequer'd scene display,
And part admit, and part exclude the day ;
As some coy nymph her lover's warm address
Nor quite indulges, nor can quite repress.
There, interspers'd in lawns and op'ning glades,
Thin trees arise that shun each other's shades.
Here in full light the russet plains extend :
There wrapt in clouds the blueish hills ascend.
Ev'n the wild heath displays her purple dyes,
And 'midst the desert fruitful fields arise,
That crown'd with tufted trees and springing corn,
Like verdant isles the sable waste adorn.
Let India boast her plants, nor envy we
The weeping amber or the balmy tree,
While by our oaks the precious loads are born,
And realms commanded which those trees adorn.
Not proud Olympus yields a nobler sight,
Tho' Gods assembled grace his tow'ring height,
Than what more humble mountains offer here,
Where, in their blessings, all those Gods appear.
See Pan with flocks, with fruits Pomona crown'd,
Here blushing Flora paints th' enamel'd ground,
Here Ceres' gifts in waving prospect stand,
And nodding tempt the joyful reaper's hand ;
Rich Industry sits smiling on the plains,
And peace and plenty tell, a Stuart reigns.

It will be easy to find faults in such lines.

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What, for example, ought Pope himself, the prophet of common sense, to have thought of the line in which "blushing Flora paints th' enamelled ground"? Yet they show an astonishing felicity of rhythm and a powerful feeling for composition; and they represent, it must be remembered, Pope's youthful and inferior work.

The "Messiah," an eclogue in imitation of Virgil's "Pollio," the strange poem in which the Roman poet was supposed to have foreshadowed the coming of Christ, must be dismissed with a mere mention here; nor can we devote greater consideration to the few odes which Pope wrote in metres other than the heroic couplet. One of these, written for St. Cecilia's Day, challenges an unfavourable comparison with Dryden's "Alexander's Feast"; another which we quote is the only successful excursion that Pope made into the heights of lyric poetry.

THE DYING CHRISTIAN TO HIS SOUL

Vital spark of heav'nly flame !
Quit, oh quit this mortal frame :
Trembling, hoping, ling'ring, flying,
Oh the pain, the bliss of dying !
Cease, fond Nature, cease thy strife,
And let me languish into life.

Hark ! they whisper ; Angels say,
Sister Spirit, come away.
What is this absorbs me quite ?
Steals my senses, shuts my sight,
Drowns my spirits, draws my breath ?
Tell me, my Soul, can this be Death ?

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The world recedes ; it disappears !
Heav'n opens on my eyes ! my ears
With sounds seraphic ring :
Lend, lend your wings ! I mount ! I fly !
O Grave ! where is thy Victory ?
O Death ! where is thy Sting ?

II

POPE'S work hitherto had been for the most part preliminary training ; but in 1709, at the age of twenty-one, he had completed the first of the poems which he brings with him into the temple of Fame. This was the "Essay on Criticism," and the appearance of this poem in 1711, after two further years of careful polishing, took the literary world by storm. Every one was bound now to recognize that the heir of Dryden had appeared. The great Addison himself was enthusiastic, if a little critical, in his praise ; the unknown, handicapped young man became the cynosure of every critic, the new hope of his country in the sphere of poetry. The languishing Muses were vitalized into new life, by a poet who took his art seriously and had taken great pains to master its secret springs. For, though the famous "Essay" may sound somewhat trite and commonplace now, it struck the reign of Queen Anne with the force of a revelation. It was the English counterpart to Horace and Boileau. It was the first authoritative exposition of the principles of criticism in English verse ; it expressed with singular skill the current conceptions, and

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[became a sort of touchstone of good taste in poetry.

It was not, however, to be expected that this clever production of a young man of twenty could be in reality a final and comprehensive judgment satisfying to later ages. Pope's reading had been wide, but desultory and ill-digested. He flashed at the essence of a book with surprising shrewdness ; but he had neither the temperament nor as yet the experience required for a full survey of the field of poetic criticism. The result is that the poem often seems to be deep when it is merely superficially

* brilliant ; the maxims, expressed with epigrammatic force, are commonplace in everything

* except their felicitous expression ; and the more subtle and difficult phases of his subject are either evaded or obscured by dazzling gleams of brilliant wit. Nevertheless the intellectual skill that provoked the admiration of such keen minds as Addison's and Swift's—men by no means prone to the raptures of excessive praise—will keep the poem genuinely interesting, and justifies us in giving a few selections from it here. And this process of selection does no

✓ injustice to Pope in this or in any case. For he is always most interesting in the detailed parts of his poems. Incapable of a long and patient discussion, he had no superior in the rapid ✓ rapier-thrust, confounding and demolishing an opponent's views ; his poems shine with electric brilliance along a hundred lines, but give only a confused radiance for their whole effect ; and

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the "Essay on Criticism," weak as a sustained argument, leaves thus a vague impression of much flashing and glittering, without steady light.

The argument of the poem is arranged in three parts. First, the poet discusses the necessity of having before us certain fixed rules for our guidance as poetic critics. We are all critics by nature, but the multitude of opinions makes it evident that the result of unguided criticism is chaos. What are we then to do? Pope's answer is unexceptionable : turn to Nature.

*Critics
structure*

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame]
By her just standard, which is still the same :
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
One clear, unchang'd, and universal light,
Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
At once the source, and end, and test of Art.
Art from that fund each just supply provides,
Works without show, and without pomp presides :
In some fair body thus th' informing soul
With spirits feeds, with vigour fills the whole,
Each motion guides, and ev'ry nerve sustains ;
Itself unseen, but in th' effects, remains.
Some, to whom Heav'n in wit has been profuse,
Want as much more, to turn it to its use ;
For wit and judgment often are at strife,
Tho' meant each other's aid, like man and wife.
'Tis more to guide, than spur the Muse's steed ;
Restrain his fury, than provoke his speed ;
The winged courser, like a gen'rous horse,
Shows most true mettle when you check his course.

But how are we to know when we are follow-

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✓ **F**ing Nature? The just critic alone can guide us ; he has framed his code of rules for our benefit, and

Those Rules of old discover'd, not devis'd,
Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd.

These necessary rules, analogous to laws of Nature, were based on the practice of the Greeks, in days when

The gen'rous Critic fann'd the Poet's fire
And taught the world with reason to admire.

Whereas to-day the critic is but a fault-finder,
vain to display his own learning, prying with
a captious microscope for petty errors. Examine
the rules that good critics have drawn from
Homer, if you will ; you will find, as Virgil
found, that Nature and Homer are the same.

You then whose judgment the right course would
steer,
Know well each Ancient's proper character ;
His fable, subject, scope in ev'ry page ;
Religion, Country, genius of his Age :
Without all these at once before your eyes,
Cavil you may, but never criticize.
Be Homer's works your study and delight,
Read them by day, and meditate by night ;
Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims
bring,
And trace the Muses upward to their spring.
Still with itself compar'd, his text peruse ;
And let your comment be the Mantuan Muse.

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Of course some beauties there are that override all rules ; faults too, not a few, can be pardoned in a genius, and are not to be made an excuse for complete condemnation ; moreover, we must suppose that many liberties taken by a Homer in contravention of our rules have an ulterior end leading to beauty.

Those oft are stratagems, which error seem,
Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.

Inculcating therefore a becoming reverence for the ancients, especially for Homer and Virgil, Pope makes his appeal to critics to respect the rules derived from them, and thus

Ancient Critics

To teach vain Wits a science little known,
T'admire superior Sense, and doubt their own.

In the second part of the poem Pope turns to the causes of the individual critic's errors. The commonest source of bad judgments is pride, "the never-failing voice of fools." Next comes the insufficiency of learning that makes the most superficial reader rush in and criticize, on the principle that the less one knows the more confident one is about it. An eloquent passage, on the endless range of learning possible to the true explorer, illustrates this point.

A little learning is a dang'rous thing ;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring :
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.

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Fir'd at first sight with what the Muse imparts,
In fearless youth we tempt the heights of Arts,
While from the bounded level of our mind
Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind ;
But more advanc'd, behold with strange surprise
New distant scenes of endless science rise !
So pleas'd at first the tow'ring Alps we try,
Mount o'er the vales, and seem to tread the sky,
Th' eternal snows appear already past,
And the first clouds and mountains seem the last ;
But, those attain'd, we tremble to survey
The growing labours of the lengthen'd way,
Th' increasing prospects tire our wand'ring eyes,
Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise !

Criticism { A true critic will seek to arrive at what the author's aims were, and will therefore attend to the whole design before dissecting its details. We cannot expect a piece to be faultless in any respect ; and those critics who make " the Whole depend upon a Part," who confine their whole judgment to an examination of one aspect of a work, err against the fundamental test of all criticism—common sense. We find many whose whole attention is given to the language of a poem, and who

value books, as women men, for Dress ;

others seek sweetness, and still others smoothness, in the versification ; while a more numerous class demand an ever-present wit, and cannot tolerate a poem which is not liberally adorned with far-fetched tropes and unusual

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turns of thought. Such "wit" is artificial, and not essential to true poetry. But,

True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd.

By this aphorism Pope seems to mean that all forms of expression which exceed the normal habit of human nature are inappropriate. What the true critic must seek is a diction purged alike of freakish fancy and imaginative enthusiasm.

True wit does not run away with itself, nor leave the solid ground of sense; it must excite the intellect, but keep a tight rein upon the emotions.

This is essentially the eighteenth-century tone, and nowhere is its literary ideal better expounded than in the "Essay on Criticism." The poem is the key to Pope's method. It is the apology for clear, practical, worldly sense as the guiding principle of literature. Pope is the Walpole of literature; his appeals to passion are either personal or merely rhetorical; a clever couplet is a far finer thing to him than a burst of generous indignation which carries us away from the anchorage of common sense. "Avoid extremes," he urges; but he means little more than "avoid enthusiasms."

The consequence of his theory is seen in the poem itself. Many of its passages are little more than cleverly rhymed prose; and the whole illustrates rather the maxim that

Nature's chief masterpiece is writing well than the higher laws of criticism. He lectures

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critics on the necessity of good manners, on holding themselves free from personal malice or spite, on facing the jeers even of the ignorant with good humour.

Good nature 'and good sense must ever join ;
To err is human : to forgive, divine.

✓ But, even as he does so, he introduces an offensive reference to a minor writer of his time, named John Dennis—a sneer which led to a long and bitter enmity. His sketch of the history of criticism from Aristotle and Horace to Roscommon and Walsh is superficial, and it is evident that his knowledge was not deep enough to enable him to write anything of great value on this subject. Still, though we must not expect to find the “ Essay on Criticism ” an inspired poetic guide, we must not underrate what it did, nor forget that there is a partial truth enfolded in it. The faculty of final and distinguished expression is not the poet's highest gift ; yet it is equally true that slovenly diction, which does not express what was meant, and the sense of which is obscure, must remain always intolerable in poetry ; and Pope's poem, by insisting upon the necessity of unambiguous and natural language, did literature a real service.

✓

* He made of poetry too conscious, too purely intellectual, an exercise ; his “ Nature methodiz'd ” became entirely a convention, an artifice, almost a trick, so that many an inferior writer could imitate the superficial knack of it.

The “ Essay on Criticism,” with all its defects,

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was almost a revelation to its generation. It made Pope, hitherto almost unknown, the most talked-of man of letters in London. At the age of twenty-one he was by general agreement recognized as the successor of Dryden among the poets. His work brought him to the notice of Addison and his circle ; and soon afterwards he made the acquaintance of Swift, who was then the most powerful literary personality in London. He had for some time moved about in society, putting on the airs of the dissolute rake with little success ; but now he was to rise to the level of the greatest in the land. Statesmen like Bolingbroke and Halifax came to be numbered among his friends ; but Pope was never overawed by such : Halifax indeed came, like Addison, beneath the lash of his satire in later years. Pope's affinities were with the Tories and Jacobites, Bolingbroke and Swift ; and with these two men his friendship was unbroken.

But with Addison it was different. The pages of the "Spectator," whose numbers were appearing when Pope published his "Essay on Criticism," reveal the character of that urbane critic and commentator on life with sufficient clearness. We cannot imagine him other than a gentleman. But beneath his kindly irony we may sometimes catch the ghost of a tenuous scorn lurking ; and his discriminating criticisms of contemporary writers, while generally just, can never be charged with a whole-hearted enthusiasm. With all his good qualities, Addison was in fact a man of his age, coldly clear and

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correct in his literary deportment. Moreover, he was a Whig ; and on the whole it is not surprising that there should have developed a certain antipathy between him and Pope. In the famous quarrel between them Addison was certainly not the aggressor ; and it is difficult to perceive now any other cause for it than Pope's irritable and morbid vanity.

We do not intend here to attempt the uncongenial task of following out the labyrinth of Pope's hatreds. But some of them led to important literary work, and must therefore at least be mentioned. In the case of Addison, Pope was in the first instance flattered by a notice of the "Essay on Criticism" in the "Spectator"—a notice which was as favourable as a young author could expect. Moreover, it led to Pope's introduction to Addison and the Whig circle, and he afterwards contributed to the "Spectator," and to Steele's later venture, the "Guardian." Still more—he was invited by Addison to contribute a prologue to his important tragedy "Cato," which was acted in 1713. The "rift within the lute" appeared when John Dennis wrote an over-candid criticism of this popular but pompous play. Now Dennis was a Whig, of surly temper and violent language ; and, annoyed by a reference to himself in the "Essay on Criticism," he had published a scathing diatribe against that poem. In spite of many excesses, the attack hit the mark in several instances, and Pope never forgave Dennis, although he bided his time for a

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suitable revenge. This was provided by his enemy's attack on "Cato." Pope replied to it with a scurrilous pamphlet, entitled "The Narrative of Dr. Robert Norris on the Frenzy of J. D." This has little wit and less humour ; its chief ingredient is personal abuse, and rancour is its main sauce. Addison, disapproving such modes of criticism so foreign to Pope's own principles, disavowed the defence of his play, and thus made Pope his enemy by putting him in the invidious position of an officious friend.

Certain other incidents widened the breach. Pope had been annoyed by Addison's article on pastoral poetry, in which very little space had been given to him, and much more to the pastorals of Ambrose Phillips, the original "namby-pamby" poet. His revenge on this occasion took the form of an article, which he imposed upon Steele as anonymous, containing an ironical panegyric on Phillips' poetry. Steele evidently read the manuscript carelessly, and published the veiled attack on Addison's friend in the "Spectator." Naturally, Phillips was not pleased ; he is said to have hung up a birch in Button's coffee-house in readiness for Pope's next visit—a proceeding which stung the weakly poet still further ; and obviously the whole episode made Pope impossible in the circle of Addison's friends. And in fact he was drifting more and more into the opposite party. The final blow was given to the friendship by Addison's further offence in connection with the translation of Homer.

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On the eve of the publication of the first volume of Pope's version, a translation of the first book of Homer was announced by Thomas Tickell, one of Addison's "little senate" of admirers. It appears that Addison had aroused Pope's suspicions by certain suggestions about "The Rape of the Lock," which Pope's friends ascribed to jealousy ; but in the case of Tickell's "Iliad," what had before been no more than a simmering uneasiness became bitter and unreasoning hatred. Pope's "Iliad" had been well advertised beforehand, and undoubtedly Tickell's attempt at the same task, under the patronage of Addison, looked like competition at least, and was magnified by Pope into a deliberate plot to injure his reputation and to blanket his profits. There probably was no trace of such a design ; Addison himself criticized both versions in a friendly spirit and with real discernment in his "Freeholder" ; and his behaviour throughout was dignified and tolerant. Probably he regarded Pope's obsession as a mania with which it was useless to reason ; his obvious moral superiority, reinforced doubtless by a touch of supercilious and courteous disdain, left him calm and patient, but irritated Pope to a more violent hatred. The result for us was one of the master-portraits of English satire ; for it was about this time, before Addison's death in 1718, that Pope composed the first draft of the sketch of Addison as Atticus, which after infinite polishing and revising was given to the world in the "Epistle to Dr.

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Arbuthnot" in 1735. This portrait, though obviously unfriendly to its subject, is not a lopsided caricature; its brilliancy does not dispel the truth. Addison's faults are of course emphasized, but his good qualities are also recognized. It is easy to see that the charge of jealousy still survived, and that Addison's tendency to "damn with faint praise" rankled always in Pope's mind; yet he knew that true genius kindled the fires of Addison's nature. We give the passage here, and thus wash our hands of the most famous of Pope's quarrels.

Peace to all such !¹ but were there One whose fires
True Genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires ;
Blest with each talent and each art to please,
And born to write, converse, and live with ease :
Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne ;
View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,
And hate for arts that caus'd himself to rise ;
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer ;
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike, —
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike ; —
Alike reserv'd to blame, or to commend, —
A tim'rous foe, and a suspicious friend ; —
Dreading ev'n fools, by Flatterers besieg'd,
And so obliging, that he ne'er oblig'd ;
Like "Cato,"² give his little Senate laws,
And sit attentive to his own applause ;

¹ i.e., the minor scribblers such as Nahum Tate, whom he has satirized in the previous passage.

² Referring to Addison's play of that title, for which Pope himself, as we have seen, wrote a prologue.

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While Wits and Templars ev'ry sentence raise,
And wonder with a foolish face of praise :——
Who but must laugh, if such a man there be ?
Who would not weep, if Atticus¹ were he ?

✂ This immortal quarrel has carried us ahead of our story, and it is pleasing to have to turn now to a piece of work which the least sympathetic of Pope's critics must admit to be delightful. In 1712 was issued the first edition of "The Rape of the Lock," and the success of this brilliant shower of pure wit was such that Pope expanded it into its present form two years later. *Merum sal* Addison had called the first version, and certainly on this occasion he did not "damn with faint praise." So keenly did he admire it that, when Pope told him of his intention to revise it with additions, he strongly dissuaded him from doing so—advice which we may now admit to be wrong, but which Pope himself ascribed to jealousy. Certainly the supernatural sprites and sylphs, which were the principal additions, have improved the poem, and Pope carried out with great skill a task which is very rarely performed successfully—that, namely, of interlacing new threads into a work without injury to the original design.

✓ "The Rape of the Lock" arose from one of those trifling episodes which become the tragedies of social life. The small circle of English Catholics had been broken by a pretty quarrel. Lord Petre had carried a joke too far, and had

The thin disguise of the name of Addison.

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surreptitiously clipped and appropriated a lock of Miss Arabella Fermor's hair. Their friends at once fell into two hostile cliques, and a great deal of unpleasantness ensued. As a means of healing the feud, Pope's friend Caryll suggested that he should narrate the incident in humorous verse, and thus dissolve the ill-feeling in laughter. Pope readily fell in with the idea and "The Rape of the Lock" was the result.

The poem achieved its purpose, and probably that would have been the end of it if it had not been something more than a little flash of social pleasantry. The appeasement of Miss Fermor was not of itself an event of literary importance, nor was this end, however desirable it may have been, a sufficient motive for Pope. For, though Pope was undoubtedly a great wit, he had little of the true humorist in his composition; his laughter must be spiced with satire, and his very kindness flavoured with malice. That he should have seized the opportunity to play with amiable humour upon feminine foibles or upon the tyranny to paltry things under which Society lived would have been natural and fair. But Pope did more, and it is impossible to read his brilliant poem without the feeling that he was inspired by a prevailing sentiment of contempt toward the whole female sex. The witty lines read not with kindly irony but as disagreeable sneers. If Miss Fermor was pleased, as she seems to have been, with her reflection in the character of Belinda, she certainly gave countenance to what was evidently Pope's opinion—

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namely, that women generally were deficient in sense, however useful a place they might fill among the pretty adornments and light amusements of a man's life. Addison's essays on woman's foibles, among the most delightful of the "Spectator's" commentaries, are far juster to women, but reveal nevertheless the same atmosphere of delicate scorn. Perhaps the idle Society woman of Pope's day deserved no higher estimate; but it is not to be supposed that the whole sex was dominated by puffs, powders, patches and *billets-doux*. It is fair to laugh at the lovers and lap-dogs, the devotion to Bohea and China vases; it is not fair to leave us with the impression that nothing higher was possible. But if, as Pope thought, it is not a poet's business to look beyond his age, the result may be accepted, because the poem undoubtedly strikes off a vivid picture of certain prevalent fashions which were as ludicrous as they were transitory. The picture remains bright and entertaining because, under similar conditions, these fashions do arise from certain traits in female character which seem to be fundamental.

The poem was called *heroic-comical*, and this was an exact description, though we cannot so readily perceive its element of burlesque as its satire. Among the forgotten lumber of literature lies deep buried a sheaf of ponderous "heroic" epics which prosy and long-winded versifiers produced to gratify the pretentious taste of the time. No one would propose to disinter a single page of these voluminous concoc-

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tions which, like the frog in the fable, blew themselves to the size of an ox, and burst. But Pope, in casting the story of the rape of Miss Fermor's hair in the form of one of the fashionable epics, deliberately set out to kill the pest, and effectually succeeded. Thus in writing his poem with so much care and polish Pope gratified more than one side of his nature. He enjoyed his tilt against the dull and the incapable man of letters ; he enjoyed no less the keen exercise of his malicious satirical rapier, the sharpening and polishing of his cutting lines ; and he was not insensible to the social popularity that he expected to win by his work. The poem was introduced by a letter to Miss Fermor, the veiled sarcasm of which seems to have been beyond that lady's understanding. Pope, explaining to her, for example, the function of his sylphs, tells her that he owes them to a French book on the Rosicrucian fancies which " both in its title and size is so like a novel, that many of the fair sex have read it for one by mistake." He elaborates the duties of these sprites further. After a description of the glories of Belinda, which is a masterpiece of delicious irony, we are told how

The Sprites of fiery Termagants in Flame
Mount up, and take a Salamander's name.
Soft yielding minds to Water glide away,
And sip, with Nymphs, their elemental tea. ✓
The graver Prude sinks downward to a Gnome,
In search of mischief still on Earth to roam.
The light Coquettes in Sylphs aloft repair,
And sport and flutter in the fields of Air.

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These spirits, entering into the hearts of living ladies, act as their guides and protectors. It is they also who cause "the eyes of young coquettes to roll," and guide them through the intricate paths along which "they shift the moving Toyshop of their heart." One of these sylphs is the especial guardian of Belinda through her adventurous day.

Of these am I, who thy protection claim,
A watchful sprite, and Ariel is my name.
Late, as I rang'd the crystal wilds of air,
In the clear Mirror of thy ruling Star
I saw, alas ! some dread event impend,
Ere to the main this morning sun descend,
But heav'n reveals not what, or how, or where :
Warn'd by the Sylph, oh pious maid, beware !
This to disclose is all thy guardian can :
Beware of all, but most beware of Man !

He said ; when Shock, who thought she slept too long,
Leap'd up, and wak'd his mistress with his tongue.
'Twas then, Belinda, if report say true,
Thy eyes first open'd on a Billet-doux ;
Wounds, Charms, and Ardors were no sooner read,
But all the Vision vanish'd from thy head.

And now, unveil'd, the Toilet stands display'd,
Each silver Vase in mystic order laid.
First, rob'd in white, the Nymph intent adores,
With head uncover'd, the Cosmetic pow'rs.
A heav'nly image in the glass appears,
To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears ;
Th' inferior Priestess, at her altar's side,
Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride.

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Unnumber'd treasures ope at once, and here
The various off'rings of the world appear ;
From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring spoil.
This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,
Transform'd to combs, the speckled, and the white.
Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.
Now awful Beauty puts on all its arms ;
The fair each moment rises in her charms,
Repairs her smiles, awakens ev'ry grace,
And calls forth all the wonders of her face ;
Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,
And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.
The busy Sylphs surround their darling care,
These set the head, and those divide the hair,
Some fold the sleeve, whilst others plait the gown ;
And Betty's prais'd for labours not her own.

Who can doubt the element of irony in such a clever passage as this ? It is, however, merely preliminary ; and the real story does not begin until the second canto. In mock-heroic strain this story is kept up with genuine spirit to the end. No better example of this style can be given than the following account of the heroine's triumphal setting-out.

Not with more glories, in th' etherial plain,
The Sun first rises o'er the purpled main,
Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams
Launch'd on the bosom of the silver Thames.

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Fair Nymphs, and well-drest Youths around her
shone,

But ev'ry eye was fix'd on her alone.
On her white breast a sparkling Cross she wore,
Which Jews might kiss, and Infidels adore.
Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
Quick as her eyes, and as unfix'd as those :
Favours to none, to all she smiles extends ;
Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike,
And, like the sun, they shine on all alike.
Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,
Might hide her faults, if Belles had faults to hide :
If to her share some female errors fall,
Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.

This Nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
Nourish'd two Locks, which graceful hung behind
In equal curls, and well conspir'd to deck
With shining ringlets the smooth iv'ry neck.
Love in these labyrinths his slaves detains,
And mighty hearts are held in slender chains.
With hairy springes we the birds betray,
Slight lines of hair surprise the finny prey,
Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare,
And beauty draws us with a single hair.

Th' advent'rous Baron the bright locks admir'd ;
He saw, he wish'd, and to the prize aspir'd.
Resolv'd to win, he meditates the way,
By force to ravish, or by fraud betray ;
For when success a Lover's toil attends,
Few ask, if fraud or force attain'd his ends.

For this, ere Phœbus rose, he had implor'd
Propitious heav'n, and ev'ry pow'r ador'd,
But chiefly Love—to Love an altar built,
Of twelve vast French Romances, neatly gilt.

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There lay three garters, half a pair of gloves ;
And all the trophies of his former loves ;
With tender Billet-doux he lights the pyre,
And breathes three am'rous sighs to raise the
fire.

Then prostrate falls, and begs with ardent eyes
Soon to obtain, and long possess the prize :
The pow'rs gave ear, and granted half his pray'r,
The rest, the winds dispers'd in empty air.

Gloriously then the vessel pursues her proud
course, and every one is happy, basking in the
radiance of Belinda. But the sylphs are anxious,
and hold a conference round the gilded mast, in
which Ariel, after declaring that the greater
spirits preside over mankind's greater actions,
thus instructs his fellow-sylphs in their duties
for the day :

Our humbler province is to tend the Fair,
Not a less pleasing, tho' less glorious care ;
To save the powder from too rude a gale,
Nor let th' imprison'd essences exhale ;
To draw fresh colours from the vernal flow'rs ;
To steal from rainbows ere they drop in show'rs
A brighter wash ; to curl their waving hairs,
Assist their blushes, and inspire their airs ;
Nay oft, in dreams, invention we bestow,
To change a Flounce, or add a Furbelow.

This day, black Omens threat the brightest Fair,
That e'er deserv'd a watchful spirit's care ;
Some dire disaster, or by force, or slight ;
But what, or where, the fates have wrapt in night.
Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,
Or some frail China jar receive a flaw ;

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Or stain her honour or her new brocade ;
 Forget her pray'rs, or miss a masquerade ;
 Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball ;
 Or whether Heav'n has doom'd that Shock must fall.
 Haste, then, ye spirits ! to your charge repair :
 The flutt'ring fan be Zephyretta's care ;
 The drops to thee, Brillante we consign ;
 And, Momentilla, let the watch be thine ;
 Do thou, Crispissa, tend her fav'rite Lock ;
 Ariel himself shall be the guard of Shock.

To fifty chosen Sylphs, of special note,
 We trust th' important charge, the Petticoat :
 Oft have we known that seven-fold fence to fail,
 Tho' stiff with hoops, and arm'd with ribs of whale ;
 Form a strong line about the silver bound,
 And guard the wide circumference around.

Whatever spirit, careless of his charge,
 His post neglects, or leaves the fair at large,
 Shall feel sharp vengeance soon o'ertake his sins,
 Be stopp'd in vials, or transfix'd with pins ;
 Or plung'd in lakes of bitter washes lie,
 Or wedg'd whole ages in a bodkin's eye :
 Gums and Pomatums shall his flight restrain,
 While clogg'd he beats his silken wings in vain ;
 Or Alum styptics with contracting pow'r
 Shrink his thin essence like a rivet'd flow'r :
 Or, as Ixion fix'd, the wretch shall feel
 The giddy motion of the whirling Mill,
 In fumes of burning Chocolate shall glow,
 And tremble at the sea that froths below !

As the journey proceeds the sylphs become
 more anxious at the omens of impending Fate.
 But Hampton Court, the rendezvous of the
 expedition, is reached, where the heroes and

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nymphs gossip about the Court and many other concerns of many people, so that

At every word a Reputation dies. ✓

It is at this point that Pope indulges his amiable sarcasm at the expense of Queen Anne : *

Here thou, great Anna, whom three realms obey,
Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes Tea. ✓

At last the day declines, and the final troubles of the toilet are over when the party sits down to a serious game of ombre. This game is described with real skill, and Belinda's triumph over the Baron suitably celebrated. Then over the tea the Baron meditates revenge and cons new stratagems to gain one of the bewitching locks. The sylphs guard their treasure successfully, until the coffee comes and brightens the Baron's brains, so that in spite of warnings he takes advantage of a sudden opportunity which offers.

But when to mischief mortals bend their will,
How soon they find fit instruments of ill !
Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace
A two-edg'd weapon from her shining case :
So Ladies in Romance assist their Knight,
Present the spear, and arm him for the fight.
He takes the gift with rev'rence, and extends
The little engine on his fingers' ends ;
This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,
As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head.
Swift to the Lock a thousand sprites repair,
A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair ;

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And thrice they twitch'd the diamond in her ear ;
Thrice she looked back, and thrice the foe drew
near.

Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought
The close recesses of the Virgin's thought ;
As on the nosegay in her breast reclin'd,
He watch'd th' Ideas rising in her mind,
Sudden he view'd, in spite of all her art,
An earthly Lover lurking at her heart.
Amaz'd, confus'd, he found his pow'r expir'd,
Resign'd to fate, and with a sigh retir'd.

The Peer now spreads the glitt'ring Forfex wide,
T' inclose the Lock ; now joins it, to divide.
Ev'n then, before the fatal engine clos'd,
A wretched Sylph too fondly interpos'd ;
Fate urg'd the shears, and cut the Sylph in twain,
(But airy substance soon unites again)
The meeting points the sacred hair dis sever
From the fair head, for ever, and for ever !

✓ Then flash'd the living lightning from her eyes,
And screams of horror rend, th' affrighted skies.
Not louder shrieks to pitying heav'n are cast,
When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last ;
Or when rich China vessels fall'n from high,
In glitt'ring dust and painted fragments lie !

Let wreaths of triumph now my temples twine,
(The victor cry'd) the glorious Prize is mine !
While fish in streams, or birds delight in air,
Or in a coach and six the British Fair,
As long as Atalantis shall be read,
Or the small pillow grace a Lady's bed,
While visits shall be paid on solemn days,
When num'rous wax-lights in bright order blaze,
While nymphs take treats, or assignations give,
So long my honour, name, and praise shall live !

POPE & HIS POETRY

What Time would spare, from Steel receives its date,
And monuments, like men, submit to fate !
Steel could the labour of the Gods destroy,
And strike to dust th' imperial tow'rs of Troy ;
Steel could the works of mortal pride confound,
And hew triumphal arches to the ground. ✓
What wonder then, fair nymph ! thy hairs should feel,
The conqu'ring force of unresisted steel !

Then through a sad and melancholy throng,
wrapped in a strange vapour, flitted a gnome
from underground. He bore a vial full of griefs
and tears, and a wondrous bag wherein was
collected "the force of female lungs." He
found Belinda, pale and prostrate in the arms of
Thalestris. }

Sunk in Thalestris' arms the nymph he found,
Her eyes dejected and her hair unbound.
Full o'er their heads the swelling bag he rent,
And all the Furies issu'd at the vent.
Belinda burns with more than mortal ire,
And fierce Thalestris fans the rising fire.
"O wretched maid !" she spread her hands, and ✓
cry'd,
(While Hampton's echoes, "Wretched maid !"
reply'd)

"Was it for this you took such constant care
The bodkin, comb, and essence to prepare ?
For this your locks in paper durance bound,
For this with tort'ring irons wreath'd around ?
For this with fillets strain'd your tender head,
And bravely bore the double loads of lead ?
Gods ! shall the ravisher display your hair,
While the Fops envy, and the Ladies stare !

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Honour forbid ! at whose unrivall'd shrine
Ease, pleasure, virtue, all our sex resign.
Methinks already I your tears survey,
Already hear the horrid things they say,
Already see you a degraded toast,
And all your honour in a whisper lost !
How shall I, then, your helpless fame defend ?
'Twill then be infamy to seem your friend !
And shall this prize, th' inestimable prize,
Expos'd thro' crystal to the gazing eyes,
And heighten'd by the diamond's circling rays,
On that rapacious hand for ever blaze ?
Sooner shall grass in Hyde-park Circus grow,
And wits take lodgings in the sound of Bow ;
Sooner let earth, air, sea, to Chaos fall,
Men, monkeys, lap-dogs, parrots, perish all ! "

{ With these words she turns to Sir Plume, her beau, and bids him restore the lock. He blusters and swears, but the Baron is politely inexorable, whereupon the gnome breaks his vial, and Belinda's sorrows rush forth in the following high-pitched words :

✓ " For ever curs'd be this detested day,
Which snatch'd my best, my fav'rite curl away !
Happy ! ah ten times happy had I been
If Hampton Court these eyes had never seen !
Yet am not I the first mistaken maid,
By love of Courts to num'rous ills betray'd.
Oh had I rather un-admir'd remain'd
In some lone isle, or distant Northern land ;
Where the gilt Chariot never marks the way,
Where none learn Ombre, none e'er taste Bohea !
There kept my charms conceal'd from mortal eye,
Like roses, that in deserts bloom and die.

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What mov'd my mind with youthful Lords to roam ?
 Oh had I stay'd, and said my pray'rs at home !
 'Twas this, the morning omens seem'd to tell,
 Thrice from my trembling hand the patch-box fell ;
 The tott'ring China shook without a wind,
 Nay, Poll sat mute, and Shock was most unkind !
 A Sylph too warn'd me of the threats of fate,
 In mystic visions, now believ'd too late !
 See the poor remnants of these slighted hairs !
 My hands shall rend what ev'n thy rapine spares :
 These in two sable ringlets taught to break,
 Once gave new beauties to the snowy neck ;
 The sister-lock now sits uncouth, alone,
 And in its fellow's fate foresees its own ;
 Uncurl'd it hangs, the fatal shears demands,
 And tempts once more, thy sacrilegious hands.
 Oh hadst thou, cruel ! been content to seize
 Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these ! "

Belinda's tears fail to move the Baron ; and
 a cold douche of common sense from the elderly
 Clarissa passes unheeded. The party breaks
 into two rival armies ; shouts arise in confused
 welter of bass and treble ;

Fans clap, silks rustle, and tough whalebones crack ;
 and like the gods in Homer men and women join
 in combat, the mischievous gnome watching
 delightedly.

While thro' the press enrag'd Thalestris flies,
 And scatters death around from both her eyes,
 A Beau and Witling perish'd in the throng,
 One died in metaphor, and one in song.
 " O cruel nymph ! a living death I bear,"
 Cry'd Dapperwit, and sunk beside his chair.

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A mournful glance Sir Fopling upwards cast,
“ Those eyes are made so killing ”—was his last.
Thus on Mæander’s flow’ry margin lies
Th’ expiring Swan, and as he sings he dies.

When bold Sir Plume had drawn Clarissa down,
Chloe stepp’d in, and kill’d him with a frown ;
She smil’d to see the doughty hero slain,
But, at her smile, the Beau reviv’d again.

Now Jove suspends his golden scales in air,
Weighs the Men’s wits against the Lady’s hair ;
The doubtful beam long nods from side to side ;
At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside.

✓ See, fierce Belinda on the Baron flies,
With more than usual lightning in her eyes :
Nor fear’d the Chief th’ unequal fight to try,
Who sought no more than on his foe to die.
But this bold Lord with manly strength endu’d,
She with one finger and a thumb subdu’d :
Just where the breath of life his nostrils drew,
A charge of Snuff the wily virgin threw ;
The Gnomes direct, to ev’ry atom just,
The pungent grains of titillating dust.
Sudden, with starting tears each eye o’erflows,
And the high dome re-echoes to his nose.

“ Boast not my fall ” (he cry’d) “ insulting foe !
Thou by some other shalt be laid as low,
Nor think, to die dejects my lofty mind :
All that I dread is leaving you behind !
Rather than so, ah let me still survive,
And burn in Cupid’s flames—but burn alive.”

✓ “ Restore the Lock ! ” she cries ; and all around
“ Restore the Lock ! ” the vaulted roofs rebound.
Not fierce Othello in so loud a strain
Roar’d for the handkerchief that caus’d his pain.

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But see how oft ambitious aims are cross'd,
And chiefs contend 'till all the prize is lost !
The Lock, obtain'd with guilt, and kept with pain, ✓
In ev'ry place is sought, but sought in vain :
With such a prize no mortal must be blest,
So heav'n decrees ! with heav'n who can contest ?

Some thought the lock had vanished to the moon, the home of everything trifling and useless ; but no ! it has taken its place among the immortal stars, and long after Belinda and her beauty are dead it will be gazed upon. And the astrologer will tell the fate of empires from it, while lovers mistake it for Venus. Let Belinda mourn then no more ; her lost lock will (through Pope's poem) be adored longer than the fairest of the tresses that remained to her.

Thus ends the poem which, in spite of its slightly jarring scorn, gives more genuine pleasure than anything else of Pope's. It is the finest poem of its kind, the most exquisite and witty trifle in our literature.

III

BEFORE the revised edition of the "Rape of the Lock" was laid before the public it was generally known that its author was engaged upon the ambitious task of translating Homer's "Iliad." Before this, Pope had made the acquaintance of Swift, at that time a power in the land as the factotum-in-chief of the ascendant Tory party. By

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Swift Pope was introduced to Harley and Bolingbroke, and thus came quite close to the highest circles in the land. But, unlike Swift, he never became a violent party man ; his sympathies were with the Tories, especially after the débacle of 1714 ; but he never lost touch with the leaders of the opposing party, merely because they were Whigs. A prolonged correspondence with Swift, after the latter had returned in bitter dudgeon to Dublin, shows that Pope's friendship with the author of " Gulliver's Travels " was based upon genuine and enduring grounds. As the disappointed satirist of his age, Swift could appreciate and enter into the spirit of Pope's cutting verses ; but at present, before the gloom of a broken ambition had fallen on his mind, he used his great power and influence to advertise the coming work with the most generous zeal. He would not, he declared, allow the young poet to print before he had one thousand pounds promised for him. The result of this energetic canvassing was a tremendous success for the new translation.

Pope had published certain specimen passages of the " Odyssey," rendered at various times, in a miscellany of 1714 ; during that year, and continuously till 1720, he worked steadily and persistently at the " Iliad," doing his forty or fifty lines daily with exemplary patience and regularity. The first four books were issued in 1715 ; the remainder followed in three instalments in 1717, 1718, and 1720. The twenty-four books were thus the product of six years'

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unbroken labour, and they brought a net profit of something like £5000 to the poet. As the "Odyssey" later on added another £4000 to this, it is clear that Pope was right when he boasted that, thanks to Homer, he achieved independence and was never reduced to wielding a venal quill. His boast was a legitimate one, in an age of servile dependence on a patron's whims. He was the first poet who thus earned a fortune by his verse ; and, though his business methods were of the sharp and shrewd order, the end may be said to have atoned on the whole for the means : he raised the dignity of the poet's calling and gave a more manly tone to the literary profession in general, without writing down to the demands of patrons seeking to steal another man's fame. The completed work was dedicated, not to any of the noble and influential subscribers, but to William Congreve, the dramatist and the honoured representative of the previous generation of writers. Pope valued doubtless the social prestige which he gained from association with those in great places ; but he never cringed for it, and rightly rated more highly the approval and the fellowship of a man like Congreve. The "Iliad" had numerous adventitious aids, but it succeeded mainly on its own merits.

Was this success deserved ? In answering this we must first put out of our mind any indignation that may arise from a comparison with the "success" of incomparably greater works like "Paradise Lost." Undoubtedly, if Pope's Homer was worth its thousands, Milton's

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work was worth its tens of thousands. This is true, but we need not grudge Pope his success on that account : we have only to ask—does his work merit it ? Opinions on this subject have differed very widely, according to the point of view of the critic.

If we demand of a translator absolute faithfulness to the letter of the original, it will be clear that Pope cannot answer this test. All who are competent to make the comparison between the original and the translation have no hesitation in allying themselves with the latter half at least of the comment of Richard Bentley, the most famous classical scholar of Pope's day : " A pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer." It could scarcely be otherwise. Pope had no more than a superficial knowledge of Greek, and probably could not have construed a dozen lines accurately without a crib. He could not gain even the general sense of a passage without that assistance ; he used Chapman's and other English, as well as Latin, versions freely throughout. This rather humiliating position would, of course, be intolerable in a translator of to-day, and it was an unmistakable handicap to Pope. Nevertheless it is only fair to add that unimpeachable scholars have also failed to give us a real Homer. In pursuing the letter it is possible to miss the spirit.

But Pope also has little or nothing of the spirit of Homer. And, again, we may ask, How could he have it ? What sympathy could

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Pope have with the naïve mythology, the delight in physical combat, the tossings of tempestuous passions, the tender and unsophisticated emotions, the rosy-fingered dawns and many-splashing seas—he the sickly-bodied wit, the man of words, prophet of the drawing-room and the coffee-house? Assuredly this carefully tended hothouse plant, with his highly polished intellect, not to mention his paltry jealousies and petty spites, has little enough in common with the deep-browed monarch of the realms of gold, his culture springing straight from Nature's own encumbered soil.

We may feel that the points of contact are few enough between Homer and Pope; and the atmosphere of Homer has not been caught by his clever translator. There is no smell of mother Earth in Pope's lines, no reek of human nostrils. Nevertheless, the poem as Pope has given it to us is great in its own way. I have often put it into the hands of boys, and those who are capable of reading it are generally carried along to the end. This is a real compliment to Pope. It shows that his narrative has spirit and movement, vigour and "go"; and these are certainly Homeric merits. Pope's diction and his habit of thought may not suggest Homer, but they do produce a vivid and often moving poem. To those who read it with minds unbiased by a knowledge of Greek, of anthropology, or of Homeric literature—to young readers, in short—the long translation is almost entirely satisfying. Such readers will

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not be offended by the rhetorical fulness of the speeches, seeing that these are written with masterful strength and impetus ; they will not be fastidious about the diluted nature-pieces, like the third-hand proof of a famous landscape-painting ; they will be satisfied, as the readers of the eighteenth century were satisfied, with the profuse entertainment provided for them.

Pope's " Iliad " is, in fact, a real *tour de force*, when we recall the disabilities under which he laboured. What he tried to do he has succeeded in doing with extraordinary skill. He did not design a scholar's translation, much less a " crib " in verse ; he did not pretend to imitate either the diction or the tone of Homer. He wished to present the substance of it in a poetic dress trimmed according to the fashion of his time. He did not seek to project his age in imagination into the atmosphere of the " Iliad " : he desired rather to make a kind of eighteenth-century Homer—to bring him, as it were, up to date. This accounts for his peculiar treatment of the gods and goddesses, so personal and so naïvely intrusive in the original, but reduced to doubtful and wordy abstractions in Pope. Pope's age was an age of common sense, and the behaviour of the Homeric deities was ludicrous, and must be modified accordingly. So too Homer's direct and beautiful vignettes from Nature, fresh and genuine, are too unconventional for an age in which the wit threw scorn on all enthusiasms and in which " one green field was like any other green field." And finally, this desire to

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adapt Homer to the taste of the time is responsible for the diction and style adopted by the poet-translator.

Probably Pope never had any doubts or qualms about using the heroic couplet. To us it seems the most unlikely metre for Homer ; but the development of our verse had made it almost an obvious truism to Pope that the heroic couplet was *the* correct style for English poetry of a high order. Hence the great trouble he took in perfecting his own command of the metre : he deemed that he was improving the master-weapon of English verse. Nothing less than the highest and most correct would serve for Homer. Pope, short of being a real eighteenth-century Homer, wished to stand out to future ages in some such category ; and probably believed that Homer would have written in heroic couplets, if his work had been done in 1715. Pope's "Homer" is therefore the apotheosis of the correct style in English poetry ; it shows us how much can be done to make a great poem, by style and skill, untouched by transcendental enthusiasm or imaginative fire ; it is the real epic of the Augustan age of our literature. It reflects at once the regard for good literature and the intellectual keenness of the age ; it discloses its love of fine sentences and high-sounding rhetoric ; it is a splendid tribute to its skill in all the mechanisms of poetry, and at the same time reveals its poverty in all those finer and more subtle gleams and touches that make us feel, in the greatest poetry of greater

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epochs, the indefinable joy that comes we know not whence. The melody of "something far more deeply interfused" that haunts the lines of Homer himself, of a "Divine Comedy" or a "Hamlet" was neither heard nor sought in Pope's days. And the very fact that its authentic epic is not original is in itself a witness to the poverty of the Augustan age in creative genius, and shows that Pope himself recognized, unconsciously it may be, that clearness and common sense were not all in all.

Take it for what it is, however, and Pope's "Iliad" is very far from a failure. It is eminently readable, undeniably clever and astonishingly even. The passage we choose illustrates both its strength and its weakness. We shall not like such ornamental phrases as "refulgent orb"; but we shall admit that in general spirit the piece is not entirely unworthy.

THE DEATH OF HECTOR

Fierce, at the word, his weighty sword he drew,
And, all collected, on Achilles flew.
So Jove's bold bird, high balanced in the air,
Stoops from the clouds to truss the quivering hare.
Nor less Achilles his fierce soul prepares :
Before his breast the flaming shield he bears,
Refulgent orb ! above his fourfold cone
The gilded horse-hair sparkled in the sun,
Nodding at every step : (Vulcanian frame !)
And as he moved, his figure seem'd on flame.
As radiant Hesper shines with keener light,
Far-beaming o'er the silver host of night,

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When all the starry train emblaze the sphere :
So shone the point of great Achilles' spear.
In his right hand he waves the weapon round,
Eyes the whole man, and meditates the wound ;
But the rich mail Patroclus lately wore
Securely cased the warrior's body o'er.
One space at length he spies, to let in fate,
Where 'twixt the neck and throat the jointed plate
Gave entrance : through that penetrable part
Furious he drove the well-directed dart :
Nor pierced the windpipe yet, nor took the power
Of speech, unhappy ! from thy dying hour.
Prone on the field the bleeding warrior lies,
While, thus triumphing, stern Achilles cries :

“ At last is Hector stretch'd upon the plain,
Who fear'd no vengeance for Patroclus slain :
Then, prince ! you should have fear'd, what now
you feel ;

Achilles absent was Achilles still :
Yet a short space the great avenger stayed,
Then low in dust thy strength and glory laid.
Peaceful he sleeps, with all our rites adorn'd,
For ever honour'd, and for ever mourn'd :
While cast to all the rage of hostile power,
Thee birds shall mangle, and the dogs devour.”

Then Hector, fainting at the approach of death :
“ By thy own soul ! by those who gave thee breath !
By all the sacred prevalence of prayer ;
Ah, leave me not for Grecian dogs to tear !
The common rites of sepulture bestow,
To soothe a father's and a mother's woe :
Let their large gifts procure an urn at least,
And Hector's ashes in his country rest.”

“ No, wretch accursed ! ” relentless he replies ;
(Flames, as he spoke, shot flashing from his eyes ;)

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“ Not those who gave me breath should bid me spare
Nor all the sacred prevalence of prayer,
Could I myself the bloody banquet join !
No—to the dogs that carcase I resign.
Should Troy, to bribe me, bring forth all her store,
And giving thousands, offer thousands more ;
Should Dardan Priam, and his weeping dame,
Drain their whole realm to buy one funeral flame :
Their Hector on the pile they should not see,
Nor rob the vultures of one limb of thee.”

Then thus the chief his dying accents drew :
“ Thy rage, implacable ! too well I knew :
The Furies that relentless breast have steel'd,
And cursed thee with a heart that cannot yield.
Yet think, a day will come, when fate's decree
And angry gods shall wreak this wrong on thee ;
Phœbus and Paris shall avenge my fate,
And stretch thee here before the Scæan gate.”

He ceased. The Fates suppress'd his labouring
breath,
And his eyes stiffen'd at the hand of death ;
To the dark realm the spirit wings its way,
(The manly body left a load of clay,)
And plaintive glides along the dreary coast,
A naked, wandering, melancholy ghost !

Achilles, musing as he roll'd his eyes
O'er the dead hero, thus unheard, replies :
“ Die thou the first ! When Jove and heaven ordain,
I follow thee ”—He said, and stripp'd the slain.
Then forcing backward from the gaping wound
The reeking javelin, cast it on the ground.
The thronging Greeks behold with wondering eyes
His manly beauty and superior size ;
While some, ignobler, the great dead deface
With wounds ungenerous, or with taunts disgrace :

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“How changed that Hector, who like Jove of late,
Sent lightning on our fleets, and scatter'd fate ! ”
High o'er the slain the great Achilles stands,
Begirt with heroes and surrounding bands ;
And thus aloud, while all the host attends :
“ Princes and leaders ! countrymen and friends !
Since now at length the powerful will of heaven
The dire destroyer to our arm has given,
Is not Troy fallen already ? Haste, ye powers !
See, if already their deserted towers
Are left unmann'd ; or if they yet retain
The souls of heroes, their great Hector slain.
But what is Troy, or glory what to me ?
Or why reflects my mind on aught but thee,
Divine Patroclus ! Death hath seal'd his eyes ;
Unwept, unhonour'd, uninterr'd he lies !
Can his dear image from my soul depart,
Long as the vital spirit moves my heart ?
If in the melancholy shades below,
The flames of friends and lovers cease to glow,
Yet mine shall sacred last ; mine, undecay'd,
Burn on through death, and animate my shade.
Meanwhile, ye sons of Greece, in triumph bring
The corpse of Hector, and your pæans sing.
Be this the song, slow-moving toward the shore,
'Hector is dead, and Ilion is no more.' ”

Then his fell soul a thought of vengeance bred ;
(Unworthy of himself, and of the dead) ;
The nervous ankles bored, his feet he bound
With thongs inserted through the double wound ;
These fix'd up high behind the rolling wain,
His graceful head was trail'd along the plain.
Proud on his car the insulting victor stood,
And bore aloft his arms, distilling blood.

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He smites the steeds ; the rapid chariot flies ;
The sudden clouds of circling dust arise.
Now lost is all that formidable air ;
The face divine, and long-descending hair,
Purple the ground, and streak the sable sand ;
Deform'd, dishonour'd in his native land,
Given to the rage of an insulting throng,
And, in his parents' sight, now dragg'd along !

The laborious task having been completed to the satisfaction of his patrons, Pope was without question the monarch of the literary men of his day. Addison was dead and Swift exiled in Ireland ; and no one else could approach him. Thomas Tickell, whose version of the first book of the " Iliad " appeared in 1715 and blew the smouldering quarrel with Addison into flame, gave up the competition, and along with the rest of his contemporaries recognized Pope's right to the poet's royal laurels.

For awhile Pope enjoyed his fame in repose ; but repose did not suit his restless brain. He carried out an edition of Shakespeare which appeared in 1725. This was a failure, and deservedly so. Pope was no antiquary, nor even a careful student ; and a plodding editor named Theobald did much better editorial work than Pope—a crime which Pope did not forgive. But Pope did this work in a perfunctory spirit, for he was soon embarked upon a translation of Homer's " Odyssey," which brought him almost as much profit but much less fame than his " Iliad " had done. Though he was not averse from the rewards, he had grown weary of the

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drudgery of translation ; consequently he called to his aid two young Cambridge poets, named Broome and Fenton. These two unknown men appear to have done half the work and to have received about one-eighth of the profits. Pope's conduct in the business was somewhat slippery. His coadjutors were as well paid as they could expect ; but the sale of the book was greatly increased by the reputation of Pope, and he was very equivocal in his references to the work of his partners. The morality of foisting upon the public as his own the work of inferior men is open to severe criticism. No great harm was done, since Pope's share of the "Odyssey" is very difficult to distinguish on its own merits from that of his colleagues. Fenton and Broome seem to have fallen readily into the trick of composing passable couplets ; but Pope had fallen below the high level of the "Iliad," and is far less happy in catching the softer tones of the "Odyssey" than in echoing the more resounding clang of its companion. The more delicate graces of poetry were always beyond him, and certainly his whole energy was not given to the "Odyssey."

IV

DURING the writing of his Homer important changes occurred in Pope's outer life. He had become famous as the first man of letters of his day, and felt it necessary to spend a great deal of time in London.

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He desired to live among the wits and to share their life. This involved much going to and fro, to dinner parties and literary symposia ; he could not act the lion of society unless he was prepared to drink the full cup of its pleasures. It pleased him to pose as a rake, to boast of long convivial evenings, even of drunkenness ; and certainly he could write letters as offensive in obscene suggestion as need be desired, to his lady friends as well as to his intimates. We may suppose, however, that this was to a great extent bravado. The fast life did not suit his health, and he suffered as much from a mild dissipation as a strong man would from a regular debauch. Headaches and attacks of sickness alternated in his delicate frame. He seems, even in these early days, to have been almost helpless to perform many of the common necessities of life for himself. Treated thus as a semi-invalid, he could not indulge his affectation of extreme dissoluteness ; it is indeed remarkable that he was ever able to accomplish work which, whatever else we may say of it, shows an unclouded and exceptionally lucid intellect. He often visited Bath in the summer, often entertained his friends at home ; but necessity made him always the most abstemious member of his party. Nor was he sparing of his wine merely ; he did not talk freely, and often slept in presence of his guests. He was a ready wit, skilful in anecdote and bright in repartee ; but his grains of wisdom he did not scatter at random, rather treasured them, or coined them

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into couplets for future use. Many of his best thoughts and sayings were thus snatched from the smoke of tittle-tattle, and committed to odd scraps of paper on the spur of a moment. This habit of recording his thoughts as they occurred became an obsession with Pope, and is responsible for the flashy fitfulness of much of his work. A great deal of the *Homer* was written on the backs of old envelopes. But perhaps this was for the sake of economy. Swift at all events referred to his friend humorously as "paper-sparing Pope."

In 1716 the poet with his father and mother removed to Chiswick, into a house entitled "Mawson's New Buildings," on the banks of the Thames. Here he was close to two famous men who became his friends for the remainder of his life. One of these was the Earl of Peterborough, the hero of the Spanish wars, an eccentric but brilliant nobleman with strong Whig antipathies. The other was Lord Burlington, a leader of fashionable society, a cultured dilettante and accomplished patron of art and letters, now best known from his association with Pope. Here Pope was as happy as his fretful temperament and frequent quarrels would allow. But here also his father died in 1717, and Pope was a little freer as well as a little richer. On both accounts he was impelled to move further up the river to Twickenham in 1718, where he lived with his mother till her death, and where he spent the rest of his life.

In spite of pleasure and in spite of ill-health

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much work went on during these years. Pope could not be idle. Apart from the *Homer* he published a poor paraphrase of Chaucer's "Temple of Fame" which had been written as early as 1711. In 1717 appeared another poem which had probably been written at an earlier date—the "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady"—one of the most masterly and most finished of his compositions.

The unfortunate lady of this poem has not been identified with certainty. The most likely conjecture makes her a Mrs. Weston, who very early in her married life separated from her husband on account of his ill-treatment. Pope intervened, it appears, somewhat officiously, and a temporary reconciliation followed. But the end was disastrous, and possibly formed the real basis of the present poem. Whether this episode inspired it or not, however, the "Elegy" is of real interest as a study of passion. It is rare to find Pope giving way to his feelings—so rare that there are many critics who declare the passion simulated and the grief unreal. To say that the story is a fiction, however, is not to condemn the poem. Few readers will feel that Pope is expressing an intense personal sorrow; but if he has conceived and realized the passion dramatically, as Shakespeare grasped and embodied the passion of a Hamlet or Macbeth, the poem must be adjudged a success. That it is splendid rhetoric no one can doubt: has it crossed the border-line which bounds the realm of true poetry? We give the poem whole, in

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order that every reader may examine the matter for himself.

ELEGY TO THE MEMORY OF AN UNFORTUNATE LADY

What beck'ning ghost, along the moon-light shade
Invites my steps, and points to yonder glade ?
'Tis she !—but why that bleeding bosom gor'd,
Why dimly gleams the visionary sword ?
Oh ever beauteous, ever friendly ! tell,
Is it, in heav'n, a crime to love too well ?
To bear too tender, or too firm a heart,
To act a Lover's or a Roman's part ?
Is there no bright reversion in the sky,
For those who greatly think, or bravely die ?

Why bade ye else, ye Pow'rs ! her soul aspire
Above the vulgar flight of low desire ?
Ambition first sprung from your blest abodes ;
The glorious fault of Angels and of Gods ;
Thence to their images on earth it flows,
And in the breasts of Kings and Heroes glows.
Most souls, 'tis true, but peep out once an age,
Dull sullen pris'ners in the body's cage :
Dim lights of life, that burn a length of years
Useless, unseen, as lamps in sepulchres ;
Like Eastern Kings a lazy state they keep,
And close confin'd to their own palace, sleep.

From these perhaps (ere nature bade her die)
Fate snatch'd her early to the pitying sky.
As into air the purer spirits flow,
And sep'rate from their kindred dregs below ;
So flew the soul to its congenial place,
Nor left one virtue to redeem her Race.

But thou, false guardian of a charge too good,
Thou, mean deserter of thy brother's blood !

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See on these ruby lips the trembling breath,
 These cheeks now fading at the blast of death :
 Cold is that breast which warm'd the world before,
 And those love-darting eyes must roll no more.
 Thus, if Eternal justice rules the ball,
 Thus shall your wives, and thus your children fall ;
 On all the line a sudden vengeance waits,
 And frequent heres shall besiege your gates.
 There passengers shall stand, and pointing say,
 (While the long fun'ral's blacken all the way)
 Lo these were they, whose souls the Furies steel'd,
 And curs'd with hearts unknowing how to yield.
 Thus unlamented pass the proud away,
 The gaze of fools, and pageant of a day !
 So perish all, whose breast ne'er learn'd to glow
 For others good, or melt at others woe.

What can atone (oh ever-injur'd shade !)
 Thy fate unpity'd, and thy rites unpaid ?
 No friend's complaint, no kind domestic tear
 Pleas'd thy pale ghost, or grac'd thy mournful
 bier.

By foreign hands thy dying eyes were clos'd,
 By foreign hands thy decent limbs compos'd,
 By foreign hands thy humble grave adorn'd,
 By strangers honour'd, and by strangers mourn'd !
 What tho' no friends in sable weeds appear,
 Grieve for an hour, perhaps, then mourn a year,
 And bear about the mockery of woe
 To midnight dances, and the public show ?
 What tho' no weeping Loves thy ashes grace,
 Nor polish'd marble emulate thy face ?
 What tho' no sacred earth allow thee room,
 Nor hallow'd dirge be mutter'd o'er thy tomb ?
 Yet shall thy grave with rising flow'rs be drest,
 And the green turf lie lightly on thy breast :

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There shall the morn her earliest tears bestow,
There the first roses of the year shall blow ;
While Angels with their silver wings o'ershade
The ground, now sacred by thy reliques made.

So peaceful rests, without a stone, a name,
What once had beauty, titles, wealth, and fame.
How lov'd, how honour'd once, avails thee not,
To whom related, or by whom begot ;
A heap of dust alone remains of thee,
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be !

Poets themselves must fall, like those they sung,
Deaf the prais'd ear, and mute the tuneful tongue.
Ev'n he, whose soul now melts in mournful lays,
Shall shortly want the gen'rous tear he pays ;
Then from his closing eyes thy form shall part,
And the last pang shall tear thee from his heart,
Life's idle business at one gasp be o'er,
The Muse forgot, and thou be lov'd no more !

The point whether the hapless lady of the poem had a real existence or not cannot be decided satisfactorily by any evidence, internal or external, that we possess. It is not likely that, during the impressionable years when he was mixing much in society, Pope was wholly lacking in chivalrous feelings towards women ; but it is certain that he never married, and doubtful whether he ever knew what it was to be in love. His friends and neighbours, the Misses Blount, were closest in intimacy with him ; and with the younger his name has often been scandalously connected, because she came to live with him. But scandal has missed its target this time. The strong friendship with Martha

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Blount never ripened into the warmer passion ; Pope treated her with the greatest respect and regard, and on his death left a large part of his fortune to her in memory of her kindness to him. The position was equivocal, but not discreditable, either to Miss Blount or to Pope.

A platonic love enlivened Pope's acquaintance with another lady, the Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who was one of the ablest and most prominent women of her time. From her early days she had been accustomed to meeting the most distinguished wits of the opposite sex on equal terms. Both before and after her marriage she was well able, as the phrase goes, to take care of herself. She was a woman of common sense, with a happy gift of irony and a sense of humour, such as was not common among the wits who admired her. When she accompanied her husband to the court of Constantinople she carried on a voluminous correspondence with her English friends, of whom Pope was one of the most ardent. Her letters have survived as her most lasting monument, and are valuable for the social history they embody no less than for their vivacious grace and ironical wit. Those which she sent to Pope treat with a cool disdain, hardly concealed, the fulsome rhetoric in which he declared his passion for her. From Pope's letters we might in fact gather that Lady Mary inspired him with a love which had mastered him at last. Here are a few sentences from one of his letters, dated October 1716 :

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“ . . . For God’s sake, madam, let not my correspondence be like a traffic with the grave, from whence there is no return. Unless you write to me, my wishes must be like a poor papist’s devotions to separate spirits who, for all they know or hear from them, either may or may not be sensible of their addresses. None but your guardian angels can have you more constantly in mind than I ; and if they have, it is only because they can see you always. If ever you think of those fine young beaux of Heaven, I beg you to reflect, that you have just as much consolation from them as I at present have from you. . . . ”

This is as near as Pope ever approached to the furnace of love. His letters were carefully composed, with a thought to their literary effect ; they are as frigid and artificial as can be conceived, and the poet’s wings were, we may feel sure, never so much as singed. Nor was Lady Mary, or her husband either, more than amused by Pope’s awkward gallantries. Later, as we shall see, they became violent enemies, and Pope’s bitterest satire was hardly bad enough for the object of his present idolatry.

In 1717, however, Pope saw only the brightness of his sun, and in sending to her the volume containing his new poem, “ *Eloïsa to Abelard*,” he hinted that the final passage of the poem might be taken as the expression of his personal feelings. This poem, dealing directly with the most passionate love, is Pope’s solitary exercise on the eternal theme of the poets ; and possibly

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it was the offspring of the same mood as produced the letters to Lady Mary. It contains, like them, some very fine language, some very passionate language ; but, like the letters again, it does not strike that note of genuine exaltation which would make it more than a film on the current of the poet's life. The simple story of Abelard and Eloïsa has a more abiding reality in our imagination than the loud-sounding rhetoric wherein Pope has clothed it. Yet the poem is intensely interesting : it shows us at least how one of the most famous love-stories of history appears when reflected in the mirror of common sense and pure intellect, in which the eighteenth century viewed things.

Eloïsa and Abelard, it is well known, lived in the twelfth century, and conceived a pure love for one another. But circumstances and Abelard's religious calling parted them, and each entered a monastery. Many years after this sacrifice a letter of Abelard's fell into Eloïsa's hands, and awoke the old passion in its full force. Pope has attempted to depict the emotions of Eloïsa as the struggle between soul and sense has to be fought out anew. The poem is too long to print as a whole ; but one extract will be sufficient to show how skilfully Pope has found noble words, which are almost equal to the tragic conflict that rages in the vestal's heart.

Come, Abelard ! for what hast thou to dread ?

The torch of Venus burns not for the dead.

Nature stands check'd ; Religion disapproves ;

Ev'n thou art cold—yet Eloïsa loves.

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Ah hopeless, lasting flames ! like those that burn
To light the dead, and warm th' unfruitful urn.

What scenes appear wher'er I turn my view ?
The dear Ideas, where I fly, pursue,
Rise in the grove, before the altar rise,
Stain all my soul, and wanton in my eyes.
I waste the Matin lamp in sighs for thee,
Thy image steals between my God and me,
Thy voice I seem in ev'ry hymn to hear,
With ev'ry bead I drop too soft a tear.
When from the censer clouds of fragrance roll,
And swelling organs lift the rising soul,
One thought of thee puts all the pomp to flight,
Priests, tapers, temples, swim before my sight :
In seas of flame my plunging soul is drown'd,
While Altars blaze, and Angels tremble round.

While prostrate here in humble grief I lie,
Kind, virtuous drops just gath'ring in my eye,
While praying, trembling, in the dust I roll,
And dawning grace is op'ning on my soul :
Come, if thou dar'st, all charming as thou art !
Oppose thyself to heav'n ; dispute my heart ;
Come, with one glance of those deluding eyes
Blot out each bright Idea of the skies ;
Take back that grace, those sorrows, and those
tears ;

Take back my fruitless penitence and pray'rs ;
Snatch me, just mounting, from the blest abode ;
Assist the fiends, and tear me from my God !

~~No, fly me, fly me, far as Pole from Pole ;~~
Rise Alps between us ! and whole oceans roll !
Ah, come not, write not, think not once of me,
Nor share one pang of all I felt for thee.
Thy oaths I quit, thy memory resign ;
Forget, renounce me, hate whate'er was mine.

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Fair eyes, and tempting looks (which yet I view !)
Long lov'd, ador'd ideas, all adieu !
Oh Grace serene ! oh virtue heav'nly fair !
Divine oblivion of low-thoughted care !
Fresh blooming Hope, gay daughter of the sky !
And Faith, our early immortality !
Enter, each mild, each amicable guest ;
Receive, and wrap me in eternal rest !

V

POPE moved to Twickenham in 1718, into a small house set in an estate of some five acres on the Thames banks. In spite of the near neighbourhood of London, this was really a rural and secluded retreat ; and Pope devoted much care to the adornment and planning of his grounds. The art of landscape gardening had become a fashionable cult of the time, and Pope entered upon the pursuit with ardour. Everything was artificially symmetrical and precise : shrubberies, dainty groves, bowling green, wilderness and kitchen garden were all set out in due proportion and regularity ; oriental temples and unexpected obelisks gave distinction to the walks ; but the special feature was a tunnel, pierced beneath the high road that cut the garden in two. This tunnel became the grotto, famous to all readers and students of Pope. It contained a cool spring, and thus formed a pleasant retreat for the poet and his friends during the summer months. Here came Bolingbroke to inoculate Pope with his phil-

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osophy ; here doubtless Swift and Pope, conspirators in satire, talked over the follies and wickednesses of mankind ; here, indeed, amid his quaint ornaments, shells and stones, Pope was happy in a unique possession and proud of his originality of taste. Not far away Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, not yet an enemy, came to reside. Lords Peterborough and Burlington were within easy reach. Only the stings of the petty scribblers who buzzed about him like hornets kept him simmering with irritation and discontent.

Pope's home-life is in fact the most pleasant feature of his story to a biographer. He was an exemplary son, both to his father and to his mother. He was kind and considerate to all who served him in any capacity at home. If his love for Lady Mary was ridiculous, his devotion to Martha Blount, though it never passed beyond the verge of friendship, was lifelong and genuine. The rest of his outer life was to be a long series of bitter quarrels ; it is therefore only just to him to record the reposeful homeliness of his private life. In public his conduct was often enough equivocal, indeed contemptible ; but he whose soul could remain proof under the scorching glance of Swift's merciless eye, who could retain the admiration of that master of scorn through many years of friendship, must have been sterling at the core. And this was undoubtedly true of Pope. He was one of the few men whom Swift honoured, and what was true of Swift was equally true of

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all those contemporaries whose opinion was worth having. Detest his petty spites as we may, Pope was a hero to his friends.

But Pope's enmities grew apace also, and most of them had literary causes and consequences. There was a pirate bookseller named Curll, who printed a volume of poems under the title of "Town Eclogues" with Pope's name on the title-page, although but one of the feeble burlesques in it was his. Pope castigated the impudent bookseller in several scurrilous pamphlets, one of which contained a realistic account of an attack of sickness produced in Curll by an overdose of wine! Curll remained an intolerable nuisance to Pope for many years. We may also mention Colley Cibber, a volatile and popular writer of light comedy who had the temerity to ridicule on the stage an absurd farce in which Pope had collaborated with his friends Gay and Arbuthnot. Now Pope was pitifully sensitive to ridicule above all things. No great man ever lived who was more dependent upon the praise and the approval of his fellow-men. Hence Cibber, who actually introduced his quite fair pleasantries while Pope was in the theatre, was added to the long list of Pope's enemies. Finally, we must not forget Lewis Theobald, soon to be the hero of "The Dunciad," who criticized in an unfavourable and pedantic spirit Pope's edition of Shakespeare and showed Pope the causes of his failure in a laborious and successful edition of his own. Theobald was soon to be enthroned as monarch of the dunces,

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in the first of the decisive battles which Pope waged on behalf of Wit against Dulness.

Pope and his circle of literary friends had for some years been associated in a club called the Scribblerus Club. To the meetings of this club came Pope, Swift, Bolingbroke, Gay, Parnell (an accomplished poet who died in 1718), and Dr. John Arbuthnot, who in some respects was the leading spirit of the society. Arbuthnot's genial personality and wide intellectual interests did much to keep the company together ; but it is important work from Swift and Pope that has kept its memory alive. Under the pseudonym of Martin Scribblerus, the members undertook to parody the verses of the minor poets and incapable literary hacks who aroused their contempt and spleen. These miscellaneous "memoirs" of Martin, however, fade in importance in the light of "Gulliver's Travels" (1726) and "The Dunciad," which did their work in more thorough fashion.

Swift visited Pope in 1726, and again in 1727 ; during these years they published some of their miscellanies in three volumes, the most interesting being Pope's "Treatise on the Bathos" in prose—a cutting satire on Pope's enemies, taken as types of literary incompetence. The effect of this very capable treatise was, however, swallowed up in the excitement of "The Dunciad," whose first edition appeared in three books in 1728. A second edition was issued in the following year, accompanied by an elaborate apparatus of prolegomena, notes and commen-

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taries by Martin Scribblerus and others. There was also a long letter, purporting to have been sent to the author by one William Cleland, which was an elaborate panegyric of the author's aims and methods. Cleland was no fiction ; he was a major in the army ; but there is not much doubt that the letter he signed was concocted by Pope himself. Praise he must have, even at the cost of a mean deception like that. But it is impossible to deal fully with the unsavoury tricks by which Pope advertised this work. He was not content with the bitter attacks on his enemies in the poem itself ; he must needs take every means—underhanded most of them were—to rub salt into the wounds he had caused.

The poem was dedicated to Swift, who was in cordial sympathy with its whole aim and in close touch with its development. Still, the idea of the work was Pope's own, though he owed something to Dryden's "MacFlecknoe," which, however, has a much narrower range. Pope's design took the whole tribe of dunces into its scope ; it was not enough for him to castigate a Shadwell or a Dennis : he must root out the whole wasps' nest, exterminate the whole vile race, and make it impossible for any of them to bring his poisoned sting into the beehive of literature, where only "sweetness and light" were required. It is this larger aim that lifts "The Dunciad" well out of the mire of mere rancorous abuse, and justifies its appearance in literature. Pope took the opportunity of gratifying his personal spleen ; but that was not all.

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He was too great a man, had himself too true a literary instinct, was too ambitious of permanent fame, to allow the greater aim to be entirely swallowed by the lower. He demolished Dennis, and many a literary grub besides ; but he made brave war also upon what he termed Dulness, the child of Night and Chaos, pretentious Incompetence and ignorant Bombast, that hydra-headed monster that infests Parnassus in a thousand disguises and undermines the fair temples of true literature. The victims buzzed and flustered beneath his ruthless pin, but it transfixed them so effectually that "The Dunciad" is now little more than a show-case of extinct names, demanding a liberal appendix of notes if we are to identify the various specimens displayed. For this reason it is not read so much as it ought to be ; in shrewd and telling wit, in the careful trimming of its barbed arrows, it is entirely characteristic of its author, and gives us a truer insight into his real nature than some of his better-known poems. Here he is at least sincere, and quite master of his theme.

The hero of the poem in the first editions was Lewis Theobald, who it will be remembered had passed adverse criticisms on Pope's Shakespeare. This he was quite competent to do, but he did it rather in the spirit of the antiquary who "hunts the letter" than of the lover of literature. His lack of the fundamental gift left him a poor and uninspiring writer ; and consequently he was a suitable centre-piece for the epic of the dunces. His knowledge was as

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a jungle through which no clear pathways had been made and into which only a diluted light was allowed to penetrate. But he carried a certain ponderous dignity which prevented him from cutting a too ridiculous figure, even when he had been duly enthroned. Unfortunately, when Pope added a fourth book to the poem and re-issued the whole in 1742, his grudge against Theobald had become cooler than that against the Poet-Laureate, Colley Cibber ; and Cibber was installed in Theobald's place. This change was inconvenient and unwise : inconvenient, because the harmony of the poem was impaired ; and unwise, because Cibber was in his own way a wit, and not a dunce. His mind was light and frivolous ; but he was not clumsy and heavy-handed, like Theobald. His comedies seem gauzy enough now ; but they have humour as well as sparkle, and, like his adaptations of Shakespeare, they retained their popularity many years. Thus Pope did not improve his work by the exchange. It need not matter very much to us now, because modern readers will usually find the details of " The Dunciad " more interesting than its general plan.

The poem begins with an invocation to the goddess of Dulness, the presiding deity of the whole, and a dedication to Swift, who may be said to be its Mephistopheles :

The Mighty Mother, and her Son, who brings
The Smithfield Muses ¹ to the ear of Kings,

¹ At Smithfield the public fairs were held, and the dramatic entertainments suited to such occasions were of a crude kind.

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I sing. Say you, her instruments the Great !
Call'd to this work by Dulness, Jove, and Fate :
You by whose care, in vain decry'd and curst,
Still Dunce the second reigns like Dunce the first ,
Say, how the Goddess bade Britannia sleep,
And pour'd her Spirit o'er the land and deep.

In eldest time, ere mortals writ or read,
Ere Pallas issu'd from the Thund'rer's head,
Dulness o'er all possess'd her ancient right,
Daughter of Chaos and eternal Night :
Fate in their dotage this fair Idiot gave,
Gross as her sire, and as her mother grave.
Laborious, heavy, busy, bold, and blind,
She rul'd, in native Anarchy, the mind.

Still her old Empire to restore she tries,
For, born a Goddess, Dulness never dies.

O Thou ! whatever title please thine ear
Dean, Drapier, Bickerstaff,¹ or Gulliver !
Whether thou choose Cervantes' serious air
Or laugh and shake in Rab'lais' easy chair,
Or praise the Court, or magnify Mankind,²
Or thy griev'd Country's copper chains unbind ;³
From thy Bœotia ' tho' her Pow'r retires,
Mourn not, my Swift, at aught our Realm acquires.
Here pleas'd behold her mighty wings outspread
To hatch a new Saturnian age of Lead.

Pope tried to maintain the tone of Swift throughout, and certainly shows much of the vigour suggested by the comparison with Rabelais. There is a great violence of satire

¹ Swift's pseudonym in his attack on John Partridge, the maker of almanacs.

² As in "Gulliver's Travels"—of course, ironically.

³ In reference to the effect of the "Drapier's Letters" in releasing the Irish from the injustice of Wood's halfpence (1724).

⁴ Ireland.

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and an apparent enjoyment of skilful mud-throwing, but very little of the broad good-humour of the Frenchman—more rather of Swift's contemptuous misanthropy. Still we must recollect that Pope wished to be considered as the great laugher at human littleness and meanness ; if his laughter is not cordial, it is because his nature had also a good share of the said meanness, and too little genial humanity.

Having described the college sacred to the Goddess in the City, he shows her on the eve of Lord Mayor's Day paying a visit to the hero in his library. He sits there in the midst of the great pile of his own works ; and, after debating within himself whether to enter the Church, to take to cards, or to become a party writer, he makes an altar of his books and proposes to make a sacrifice of them to his patron goddess. She casts a dull volume on the growing fire and then solemnly unveils her mysteries to him. One of these is that she has chosen him to be the successor of the late Poet Laureate on the throne of the Empire of Dulness, over which she presides.

The second book gives us, with a good deal of spirit but with plenty of coarseness also, an account of the solemn games instituted by the goddess in honour of the new king's proclamation. All poets, critics, party hacks and pirate booksellers flock to these games. For each class a suitable event is provided. For the poets we have exercises in the arts of " tickling,

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vociferating, diving," representing the various devices used in dedications, in empty discussions and in dirty political writing. The critics have to listen to the voluminous works of two dull authors ; in this competition every one falls asleep, and the second book ends perforce. We give, as our selection from this part of the poem, the passage which describes the plunges of the weekly newspaper writers into the Thames. It is not necessary, in order to appreciate the piece, to identify Oldmixon, Smedley or Concanen.

This labour past, by Bridewell all descend,
(As morning pray'r and flagellation end) ¹
To where Fleet-ditch with disemboгуing streams
Rolls the large tribute of dead dogs to Thames,
The king of dykes ! than whom no sluice of mud
With deeper sable blots the silver flood.
" Here strip, my children ! here at once leap in,
Here prove who best can dash thro' thick and thin,
And who the most in love of dirt excel,
Or dark dexterity of groping well.
Who flings most filth, and wide pollutes around
The stream, be his the Weekly Journals bound ;
A pig of lead to him who dives the best ;
A peck of coals a-piece shall glad the rest."
In naked majesty Oldmixon ² stands,
And Milo-like surveys his arms and hands ;
Then, sighing, thus, " And am I now three-score ?
Ah why, ye Gods, should two and two make four ? "
He said, and climb'd a stranded lighter's height,

¹ Criminals were whipped in Bridewell immediately after morning prayer.

² John Oldmixon, a very minor writer who came under Pope's lash as a perverter of history, a party hack, and a critic of himself

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Shot to the black abyss, and plung'd downright.
The Senior's judgment all the crowd admire,
Who but to sink the deeper, rose the higher.

Next Smedley¹ div'd ; slow circles dimpled o'er
The quaking mud, that clos'd, and op'd no more,
All look. all sigh, and call on Smedley lost ;
" Smedley " in vain resounds thro' all the coast.

True to the bottom see Concanen² creep;
A cold, long-winded native of the deep ;
If perseverance gain the Diver's prize,
Not everlasting Blackmore³ this denies ;
No noise, no stir, no motion canst thou make,
Th' unconscious stream sleeps o'er thee like a lake.

Now the Goddess transports the king to her temple, and lulls him to sleep with his head in her lap. In this wondrous situation strange visions float through his brain. He is led by a sibyl to the banks of Lethe, where he is met by the ghost of Elkanah Settle, who shows him in a vision the triumphs of the Empire of Dulness and in particular its gradual absorption of Britain itself. The revelation broadens into a vision of the king's own triumphs in the future, when even the stage itself will fall under his dominion, and his sons shall reign over each of the arts and sciences in turn. A few of the lines in which Settle's ghost prophesies Cibber's sway in Britain will suitably illustrate this portion of the poem.

¹ A scurrilous critic of Pope and Swift.

² Another scurrilous pamphleteer.

³ A pretentious poet, author of ponderous epics such as were burlesqued in "The Rape of the Lock."

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“ And see, my son ! the hour is on its way,
That lifts our Goddess to imperial sway :
This fav’rite Isle, long sever’d from her reign,
Dove-like, she gathers to her wings again.
Now look thro’ Fate ! behold the scene she draws !
What aids, what armies to assert her cause !
See all her progeny, illustrious sight !
Behold, and count them, as they rise to light.
As Berecynthia, while her offspring vie
In homage to the mother of the sky,
Surveys around her, in the blest abode,
An hundred sons, and ev’ry son a God :
Not with less glory mighty Dulness crown’d
Shall take thro’ Grubstreet her triumphant round ;
And her Parnassus glancing o’er at once,
Behold an hundred sons, and each a Dunce.”

The final book of the poem was not added till 1742, and is loosely tied on to the earlier ones, as a fulfilment of the prophecy with which Settle’s vision closes. The great goddess comes upon the scene in full state, with all the arts and sciences captive in her train ; there crowd about her all kinds of vain pretenders, half-educated poets, and scholars from the universities, where youths are taught to value words as a substitute for real knowledge ; many an ancient antiquary and fastidious virtuoso, with the grub-hunting entomologist and other collectors of nature’s trifles, join the throng. Upon these, her successful students, she confers appropriate honours and degrees, and concludes the whole ceremony with a prodigious yawn, the effect of which upon all classes of men is described in a passage of exceptional power. This concluding piece, one

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of the best examples of Pope's style, we give here : Pope ceases to be personal, and rises into the region of impressive poetry, as he describes the gradual approach of universal chaos, burying philosophy and poetry, religion and morality, in the gloom of primeval night.

In vain, in vain—the all-composing Hour
Resistless falls : the Muse obeys the Pow'r.
She comes ! she comes ! the sable Throne behold
Of Night primeval and of Chaos old !
Before her, Fancy's gilded clouds decay,
And all its varying Rain-bows die away.
Wit shoots in vain its momentary fires,
The meteor drops, and in a flash expires.
As one by one, at dread Medea's strain,
The sick'ning stars fade off th' ethereal plain ;
As Argus' eyes by Hermes' wand oppress,
Clos'd one by one to everlasting rest ;
Thus at her felt approach, and secret might,
Art after Art goes out, and all is Night.
See skulking Truth to her old cavern fled,
Mountains of Casuistry heap'd o'er her head !
Philosophy, that lean'd on Heav'n before,
Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.
Physic of Metaphysic begs defence,
And Metaphysic calls for aid on Sense !
See Mystery to Mathematics fly !
In vain ! they gaze, turn giddy, rave, and die.
Religion blushing veils her sacred fires,
And unawares Morality expires.
For public Flame, nor private, dares to shine ;
Nor human Spark is left, nor Glimpse divine !
Lo ! thy dread Empire, Chaos ! is restor'd ;
Light dies before thy uncreating word ;

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Thy hand, great Anarch ! lets the curtain fall,
And universal Darkness buries All.

From the passages that have been quoted, it will be clear that "The Dunciad" has merits which make it pardonable to enjoy it, notwithstanding the spiteful personalities with which it is flavoured. But we can hardly be surprised to learn that the victims of the satire were not equally entertained. The dunces responded to the attack with great volubility, and for some years Pope was engaged in beating off their onset. In the "Grub-street Journal," a periodical edited in the vein of Scribblerus, the conflict went on from 1730 to 1737 in more or less open fashion ; but here Pope was sheltered behind the veil of anonymity, though on the other hand he was charged also with papers which he probably did not write. The underhand devices which he employed for the discomfiture of his enemies are too unsavoury to be dwelt upon here ; but, in our condemnation of these, we are not to forget that the work of "The Dunciad" was a necessary work. It involved unpleasant methods, but it was an Augean stable that had to be cleansed ; and the pretentious quack, even when the pen is his weapon, is not usually moved by polite reasonings, or sensitive to any gentler treatment than the lash. Time has corrected the few cases in which Pope's judgment erred, but the vast majority of his victims are only saved from oblivion by his poem.

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VI

POPE'S next task was one which was at least more worthy of, if not more congenial to, his powers. In the years 1732-4 he published the four epistles of the "Essay on Man," his most ambitious poem. This was to be no more than an instalment of a great and comprehensive philosophical epic on man and his place in nature, in which the poet intended to expound a harmonious philosophy of mankind and incidentally to follow Milton and "justify the ways of God to Men."

This great scheme Pope probably never conceived in a concrete form ; it floated through his mind perhaps oftentimes ; but, in any case, it was a design far beyond his powers to complete. "The Dunciad" has shown us how his strength lay in the fine finish of short and isolated passages, rather than in the constructive architecture of a whole design. Wit is essentially superficial, and wit was the essence of Pope's genius ; he could not succeed in a task where depth and width of knowledge and an impersonal calm, covering an unquenchable enthusiasm for truth, were the main requirements. No writer has ever been cleverer than Pope in scoring points against an adversary in argument. He had at hand all the weapons of the skilful debater. But, are these the equipment of the poet who wishes to capture all knowledge into his province ? Is the destiny of

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man to be expounded in an epigram? or a philosophy to be crushed by an antithesis? Pope was doomed to failure in his grandiose plan, if he ever entertained it; nevertheless, the "Essay on Man," which is a part of the plan, is by no means a failure: it certainly contains some of Pope's most splendid declamation and some very fine thoughts nobly expressed.

In the composition of the "Essay on Man" Pope came very closely under the intimate influence of Bolingbroke, as in "The Dunciad" he had enjoyed the encouragement and responded to the suggestions of Swift. In both these poems the workmanship is Pope's, but the ideas were at least shared with, if not borrowed from, another. Now Bolingbroke, after some ten years in exile, returned to England in 1723, hoping also to return to some sort of political position. In spite of his schemings and his plausible promises he failed to gain his ends; the Whigs were too firmly placed in power; and Bolingbroke was compelled to find consolation for his disappointment in the study of philosophy. He retired to his seat at Dawley, near Uxbridge, and there enjoyed a high reputation among the wits as a great and original thinker.

Among the foremost of his admirers was Pope. The question whether Bolingbroke *was* a great philosopher of real originality has been often discussed, and the verdict is now generally given against him. That he was a clever, indeed brilliant, adept in giving new words to philosophical ideas not his own must be con-

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ceded to his memory ; it is enough for us to know that Pope took his metal as sterling gold, and looked up to him almost with reverence. He dedicated the " Essay on Man " to the philosopher, and this was the least he could do, inasmuch as it is clear, even without his admission of the fact, that his poem is entirely based upon the ideas of Bolingbroke. From the correspondence of Pope and Swift we gather that discussions between the two were frequent both at Twickenham and at Dawley. We can picture Pope, himself nothing of a philosopher, struck with some brilliant thought of Bolingbroke and at once committing it to rough couplets on the back of an envelope, lest it should be lost. We can see the " Essay on Man " in the making thus, when the would-be philosophical poet, who knew nothing of Descartes, Spinoza or Leibnitz, who had but a smattering acquaintance with Bacon and Locke, cherished the scraps from the Bolingbroke banquets and served them up again as a palatable réchauffé in his brilliant couplets.

Pope's " Essay on Man," then, has no pretensions to originality or depth. It is a clever man's versification of the current talk of his intellectual circle—talk which was evidently stimulating and sparkling, but was second-hand at the best. The result is a poem which readily crumbles into brilliant details, the fragments of an argument which will by no means stand firmly up. It is difficult to make out of it what Pope's general position was. Himself a Christian and a Catholic, he has been claimed as a

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defender of a revealed religion ; but many passages of the poem, will, as we shall show, contradict this. In point of fact, Pope belonged to an age essentially indifferent to religion, an age tolerant to every belief except professed atheism, a cold age in which religion and theology were identified, as matters for argument rather than enthusiasm. Pope merely reflects this attitude in the vague pantheism which does duty for Christianity in his poem. Neither the Christian nor the sceptic can gain comfort from his philosophy. This lack of a central unifying conception is fatal to the coherence of the poem ; its conclusions are inconclusive, because the author has not grasped the full meaning of the ideas he is expounding, and could not relate them to one central principle which should give them life. Think of Milton engaged on his "Paradise Lost," and we cannot wonder if Pope, to whom Milton's perfectly definite view of the relation between God and man had become a mere wordy shadow, fails to approach that sublime level.

The "Essay on Man" is, in short, but a series of disjointed ideas, some of them inconsistent with others, strung together in a loose chain which will not endure the slightest stretching. The poem cannot stand on its main argument ; but we must not therefore dismiss it altogether, especially if we find that the individual ideas are themselves worthy and have received distinguished expression. And this we certainly do find. In no other poem has Pope

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displayed more happily or more frequently his power of converting a trite truism into a pregnant and memorable aphorism, of apt allusion and arresting imagery. His theme is illustrated by all the devices known to the poetic art, used by one of the transcendent masters of the English tongue.

The first epistle considers the nature of man in general, and his place in the universe. Since we can only reason from our knowledge and experience, and since we can by the nature of things know only one small portion of the universe, how presumptuous it is for us to lay down any proposition which can only be justified by complete knowledge ! The future is hidden from us, and thus again is our reason cramped. Under these circumstances, how absurd for man haughtily to arraign Providence, and call upon Infinite Intelligence to stoop to explanations of its mysteries with us. We talk of imperfections in the scheme of things, fret over the existence of evil in human nature ; better far for us to believe that man and nature each forms part of a general order developing to some good end. Wherever you look in the visible world you will observe that Order reigns ; if Man were not clogged by his pride, he would perceive that he too was but a link in an endless chain of being, rising step by step from creatures far below, ascending to hierarchies of angels above. Let him be content with this, and not aspire to be greater than Providence made him.

The whole of this epistle is finely written, but

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its main theme will not stand examination. Pope nobly expresses and demonstrates the limitations of our reason ; but by applying this same reason to certain selected phenomena he deduces his optimistic view of the universe. If our reason is imperfect, why is this product of it to be accepted as especially valuable ? He asks in a brilliant couplet :

If plagues and earthquakes break not Heav'n's design,
Why then a Borgia or a Catiline ?

But plagues and earthquakes do make us wonder at least about the purpose of things ; they are evils, the value of which is not more apparent than that of a monster like Borgia. Reason alone cannot solve the riddle of the sphinx. Pope is right when he insists on this ; but it is merely common sense that leads us to his conclusion—not philosophy, nor religion, neither of which does he definitely call to his aid. Having made this criticism, we select three passages which will give us a glimpse of Pope's loftiest poetic powers.

THE LIMITATIONS OF REASON

Say first, of God above, or Man below,
What can we reason, but from what we know ?
Of Man, what see we but his station here,
From which to reason, or to which refer ?
Thro' worlds unnumber'd tho' the God be known
'Tis ours to trace him only in our own.
He, who thro' vast immensity can pierce,
See worlds on worlds compose one universe,

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Observe how system into system runs,
What other planets circle other suns,
What vary'd Being peoples ev'ry star,
May tell why Heav'n has made us as we are.
But of this frame the bearings, and the ties,
The strong connexions, nice dependencies,
Gradations just, has thy pervading soul
Look'd thro' ? or can a part contain the whole ?
Is the great chain, that draws all to agree,
And drawn supports, upheld by God, or thee ?

THE PRIDE OF REASON

Heav'n from all creatures hides the book of Fate,
All but the page prescrib'd, their present state :
From brutes what men, from men what spirits know :
Or who could suffer Being here below ?
The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed to-day,
Had he thy Reason, would he skip and play ?
Pleas'd to the last, he crops the flow'ry food,
And licks the hand just rais'd to shed his blood.
Oh blindness to the future ! kindly giv'n,
That each may fill the circle mark'd by Heav'n :
Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,
Atoms or systems into ruin hurl'd,
And now a bubble burst, and now a world.

Hope humbly then ; with trembling pinions soar ;
Wait the great teacher Death ; and God adore.
What future bliss, he gives not thee to know,
But gives that Hope to be thy blessing now.
Hope springs eternal in the human breast :
Man never Is, but always To be blest :
The soul, uneasy and confin'd from home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come,

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Lo, the poor Indian ! whose untutor'd mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind ;
His soul, proud Science never taught to stray
Far as the solar walk, or milky way ;
Yet simple Nature to his hope has giv'n,
Behind the cloud-topt hill, an humbler heav'n ;
Some safer world in depth of woods embrac'd,
Some happier island in the watry waste,
Where slaves once more their native land behold,
No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold.
To Be, contents his natural desire,
He asks no Angel's wing, no Seraph's fire ;
But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
His faithful dog shall bear him company.

Go, wiser thou ! and, in thy scale of sense,
Weigh thy Opinion against Providence ;
Call imperfection what thou fancy'st such,
Say, here he gives too little, there too much :
Destroy all Creatures for thy sport or gust,
Yet cry, If Man's unhappy, God's unjust ;
If Man alone engross not Heav'n's high care,
Alone made perfect here, immortal there :
Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
Re-judge his justice, be the GOD of GOD.
In Pride, in reas'ning Pride, our error lies ;
All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies.
Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes,
Men would be Angels, Angels would be Gods.
Aspiring to be Gods, if Angels fell,
Aspiring to be Angels, Men rebel :
And who but wishes to invert the laws
Of ORDER, sins against th' Eternal Cause.

Ask for what end the heav'nly bodies shine,
Earth for whose use ? Pride answers, "'Tis for
mine :

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For me kind Nature wakes her genial Pow'r,
Suckles each herb, and spreads out ev'ry flow'r ;
Annual for me, the grape, the rose renew
The juice nectareous, and the balmy dew ;
For me, the mine a thousand treasures brings ;
For me, health gushes from a thousand springs ;
Seas roll to waft me, suns to light me rise ;
My foot-stool earth, my canopy the skies."

But errs not Nature from this gracious end,
From burning suns when livid deaths descend,
When earthquakes swallow, or when tempests
sweep

Towns to one grave, whole nations to the deep ?
" No, ('tis reply'd) the first Almighty Cause
Acts not by partial, but by gen'ral laws ;
Th' exceptions few ; some change since all began
And what created perfect ? "—Why then Man ?
If the great end be human Happiness,
Then Nature deviates ; and can Man do less ?
As much that end a constant course requires
Of show'rs and sun-shine, as of Man's desires ;
As much eternal springs and cloudless skies,
As Men for ever temp'rate, calm, and wise.
If plagues or earthquakes break not Heav'n's design,
Why then a Borgia, or a Catiline ?
Who knows but he, whose hand the lightning forms,
Who heaves old Ocean, and who wings the storms ;
Pours fierce Ambition in a Cæsar's mind,
Or turns young Ammon loose to scourge mankind ?
From pride, from pride, our very reas'ning springs ;
Account for moral, as for nat'ral things :
Why charge we Heav'n in those, in these acquit ?
In both, to reason right is to submit.

Better for Us, perhaps, it might appear,
Were there all harmony, all virtue here ;

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That never air or ocean felt the wind ;
That never passion discompos'd the mind.
But ALL subsists by elemental strife ;
And Passions are the elements of Life.
The gen'ral ORDER, since the whole began,
Is kept in Nature, and is kept in Man.

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What if the foot, ordain'd the dust to tread,
Or hand, to toil, aspir'd to be the head ?
What if the head, the eye, or ear repin'd
To serve mere engines to the ruling Mind !
Just as absurd for any part to claim
To be another, in this gen'ral frame :
Just as absurd, to mourn the tasks or pains,
The great directing MIND of ALL ordains.

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul ;
That, chang'd thro' all, and yet in all the same ;
Great in the earth, as in th' ethereal frame ;
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glowes in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,
Lives thro' all life, extends thro' all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent ;
Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart :
As full, as perfect, in vile Man that mourns,
As the rapt Seraph that adores and burns :
To him no high, no low, no great, no small ;
He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all.

Cease then, nor Order Imperfection name :
Our proper bliss depends on what we blame.
Know thy own point : This kind, this due degree
Of blindness, weakness, Heav'n bestows on thee.

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Submit.—In this, or any other sphere,
Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear :
Safe in the hand of one disposing Pow'r,
Or in the natal, or the mortal hour.
All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee ;
All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see ;
All Discord, Harmony not understood ;
All partial Evil, universal Good :
And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,
One truth is clear, Whatever is, is Right.

No one can deny to such passages as these the beauty of lucid and imaginative expression. We read the shallow epigram, "Whatever is, is Right," and are irritated by the helpless fatalism implied in it into condemning the philosopher ; but the poet who has written with such magnificent power—who is master of climax and anticlimax, irony and wit, simile and antithesis in equal degree—who has carved out so many memorable lines—moves our admiration so far that we can understand Dr. Johnson's opinion that a thousand years might well elapse before English poetry produces such a master of expression as Pope.

The second epistle opens with the following splendid lines :

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan ;
The proper study of Mankind is Man.
Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,
A Being darkly wise, and rudely great :
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between ; in doubt to act, or rest ;
In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast ;

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In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer ;
Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err ;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much :
Chaos of Thought and Passion all confus'd ;
Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd ;
Created half to rise, and half to fall ;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all ;
Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl'd :
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world !

Go, wond'rous creature ! mount where Science
guides,

Go, measure earth, weigh air, and state the tides ;
Instruct the planets in what orbs to run,
Correct old Time, and regulate the Sun ;
Go, soar with Plato to th' empyreal sphere,
To the first good, first perfect, and first fair ;
Or tread the mazy round his follow'rs trod,
And quitting sense call imitating God ;
As Eastern priests in giddy circles run,
And turn their heads to imitate the Sun.
Go, teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule—
Then drop into thyself, and be a fool !

Superior beings, when of late they saw
A mortal Man unfold all Nature's law,
Admir'd such wisdom in an earthly shape,
And shew'd a Newton as we shew an Ape.

Could he, whose rules the rapid Comet bind,
Describe or fix one movement of his Mind ?
Who saw its fires here rise, and there descend,
Explain his own beginning, or his end ?
Alas what wonder ? Man's superior part
Uncheck'd may rise, and climb from art to art ;
But when his own great work is but begun,
What Reason weaves, by Passion is undone.

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Trace Science then, with Modesty thy guide ;
First strip off all her equipage of Pride ;
Deduct what is but Vanity, or Dress,
Or Learning's Luxury, or Idleness ;
Or tricks to shew the stretch of human brain
Mere curious pleasure, or ingenious pain ;
Expunge the whole, or lop th' excrescent parts
Of all our Vices have created Arts ;
Then see how little the remaining sum,
Which serv'd the past, and must the times to come ?

Man's most useful inquiries are thus directed to the examination of himself. For this task he is competent ; for the criticism of the ways of Providence he is unfit. Pope therefore bends himself to his proper duty, and finds, by crude psychology, that man is reducible to two contradictory principles :

Self-love to urge and Reason to restrain.

Virtue and vice are commingled in us ; our passions and imperfections strive for mastery within us ; and surely our development as individuals is aided by the struggle by which Reason keeps these in due order and subjection. But, is Reason our higher Self ? Is it not possible that Reason and Self-Love may become one in a conspiracy of vice ? Pope's analysis is again incomplete ; but again this does not matter much, because its component parts state acknowledged truths with matchless force. As for example :

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen ;

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Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.
But where th' Extreme of Vice, was ne'er agreed :
Ask where's the North ? at York, 'tis on the Tweed ;
In Scotland, at the Orcades ; and there,
At Greenland, Zembla, or the Lord knows where.
No creature owns it in the first degree,
But thinks his neighbour further gone than he ;
Ev'n those who dwell beneath its very zone,
Or never feel the rage, or never own ;
What happier natures shrink at with affright,
The hard inhabitant contends is right.

The third epistle discusses man in society, and tries to show that the divine purpose is served in all things and by all principles in nature. We see in various examples how self-love and the social instinct work together for beneficial ends, though often apparently in conflict and though their co-operation is not always obvious. By nice gradations man has developed his arts of government and set up his religions ; tyranny and superstition, even anarchy and scepticism—those seeming blots on the scheme of things—have often played useful parts in the progress of society. Thus self-love serves the public weal, sometimes unwittingly, but sometimes consciously, when some great man realizes that the public and the private good are one. Then true religion and good government return to mankind.

'Twas then, the studious head or gen'rous mind,
Follow'r of God, or friend of human-kind

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Poet or Patriot. rose but to restore
The Faith and Moral Nature gave before ;
Re-lum'd her ancient light, not kindled new ;
If not God's image, yet his shadow drew :
Taught Pow'rs due use to People and to Kings,
Taught nor to slack, nor strain its tender strings,
The less, or greater, set so justly true,
That touching one must strike the other too ;
'Till jarring int'rests, of themselves create
Th' according music of a well-mix'd State.
Such is the World's great harmony, that springs
From Order, Union, full Consent of things :
Where small and great, where weak and mighty made
To serve, not suffer, strengthen, not invade ;
More pow'rful each as needful to the rest,
And, in proportion as it blesses, blest ;
Draw to one point, and to one centre bring
Beast, Man, or Angel, Servant, Lord, or King.

For Forms of Government let fools contest ;
Whate'er is best administer'd is best :
For Modes of Faith let graceless zealots fight ;
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right :
In Faith and Hope the world will disagree,
But all Mankind's concern is Charity :
All must be false that thwart this One great End ;
And all of God, that bless Mankind or mend.

If Pope meant, when he wrote at the conclusion of this epistle that "self-love and social" are the same, no more than the general theory that men have organized themselves into societies in obedience to selfish instincts of self-defence and the like, he seems to be stating no more than a truism. But it is a doctrine more in keeping with a general deism than with the

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special dogmas of Christianity ; and indeed Pope's views, however confused they may be at times, show a breadth of mind, an appeal to all forms of faith, which at once does credit to himself and throws a pleasant light on the growth of toleration among his circle of friends.

The fourth epistle proceeds to apply these general considerations to the problem of human happiness. The main principle is, according to Pope, that " the Universal Cause acts not by partial, but by general laws." Hence we must not expect happiness as individuals, but must find our happiness in our contribution to the general good of all. If self-love were the only principle acting in human nature, each individual might fairly claim to be exempt from the penalties of vice and misery. But nature does not act in this partial manner, and it is folly for man to expect the gratification of his own special desires when they conflict with other desires equally natural. Prosperity and freedom from misfortune are good perhaps ; but they are no measure of virtue, no criterion of happiness. Man may be both odious and wretched, even though fame, wealth, genius, place and power are his. True virtue and true honour do not clamour for such unsubstantial rewards as these. They are the blossom of self-love alone, but real virtue cannot be acquired without due regard to the second principle of our nature—the reason that restrains the tyranny of the baser passion and subdues it to the service of mankind as a whole. The background of a truly virtuous

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character is not, in short, formed by the claims of the individual ; it is wider and more distant, universal and eternal. Arguing in this way, Pope shows that the wisest course for us is to live in accordance with the harmonious order of Providence—to believe that “ whatever is, is right,” that all partial evil is universal good ; and not to pit ourselves against the First Cause in an attitude of antagonism.

It is impossible in our short analysis to do fair justice to the eloquent thought of this epistle ; its moral tone is high throughout ; and, though we may as is usual dispute Pope’s general theses, it will on the other hand be difficult to find elsewhere so many memorable aphorisms, expressed with such finished perfection. Take one couplet only, to illustrate a power which is everywhere in Pope’s verse :

“ But sometimes Virtue starves, while Vice is fed.”
What then ? Is the reward of Virtue bread ?

And the familiar line

An honest man’s the noblest work of God,

has paid in its very familiarity the penalty of its perfection.

We must be just to Pope. His “ Essay on Man ” is in many respects defective. Its teaching as a whole is indeterminate : it is the work of a trimmer between religion and philosophy, of a Catholic who was also a man of the world, of a believer whose intellect was his supreme gift

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and interest. It suffers from this under-current conflict of aims. Further, its philosophy, such as it is, is second-hand ; it has not been properly assimilated ; it is inconsistent and confused. The poem is like the poet's thought, flashy, dogmatic, over-confident. It is unscientific, and is totally deficient in any feeling for the transcendent world beyond the limits of sense. In spite of its essentially intellectual tone, it is almost as much out of touch with exact knowledge as with mysticism. And while it has fine imaginative qualities, the sense of the mysterious and the sublime is never felt. Pope's Providence has only to be thought of in the presence of Wordsworth's Power " that rolls through all things " ; there is apparent to all the great gulf that exists between the analytic mind and the seeing, sensitive soul. Let us admit all these grave defects and try to value Pope for what he has done, rather than repine over what he has left undone. We shall then come to admire the shattered passages of the " Essay on Man " as the splendid fragments of a didactic poem, nobly imperfect in conception, keen and exalted in tone, reflecting sometimes in immortal language the best thought of its time. We cannot think altogether meanly of the author of one of the finest didactic poems in our literature. The devil can quote Scripture when it suits his purpose, we know ; but I think we are here touching Pope's deeper and real self, catching the current of his genuine enthusiasms—his bitterness and pettiness having been burned away.

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If it is superficial—if Bolingbroke was but a fetish after all—let us remember that it was written during the era of Walpole ; could any one else in 1733 have given us a loftier morality ?

We quote in conclusion the final passage in which the poet, generous to his friends as usual, acknowledges his debt to Bolingbroke.

Come then, my Friend ! my Genius ! come along ;
Oh master of the poet, and the song !
And while the Muse now stoops, or now ascends,
To Man's low passions, or their glorious ends,
Teach me, like thee, in various nature wise,
To fall with dignity, with temper rise ;
Form'd by thy converse, happily to steer
From grave to gay, from lively to severe ;
Correct with spirit, eloquent with ease,
Intent to reason, or polite to please.
Oh ! while along the stream of Time thy name
Expanded flies, and gathers all its fame,
Say, shall my little bark attendant sail,
Pursue the triumph, and partake the gale ?
When statesmen, heroes, kings, in dust repose,
Whose sons shall blush their fathers were thy foes,
Shall then this verse to future age pretend
Thou wert my guide, philosopher, and friend ?
That urg'd by thee, I turn'd the tuneful art
From sounds to things, from fancy to the heart ;
For Wit's false mirror held up Nature's light ;
Shew'd erring Pride, Whatever is, is Right ;
That Reason, Passion, answer one great aim ;
That true Self-love and Social are the same ;
That Virtue only makes our bliss below ;
And all our Knowledge is, Ourselves to Know.

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VII

THE "Essay on Man" unmistakably maintained Pope's reputation, and on the Continent it enhanced his fame. It was translated into several languages, and was found especially agreeable by the rising school of French freethinkers of whom Voltaire was the greatest representative. It is not difficult to perceive why it enjoyed an especial vogue among the deists; as we have seen, it has elaborated an optimistic theory of the universe without making recourse to revealed religion; it postulates only the universal First Cause, an abstraction conceived in a philosophical—not a theological—spirit. This was very clearly perceived on the Continent, and an attack upon the poem, solid but incoherent, was made by a Swiss curé named Crousaz. Later on Voltaire came to take a less sanguine view of the problem, especially in face of the great earthquake at Lisbon; and Pope's philosophical pretensions were finally quashed by Lessing. Only the attack of Crousaz, however, disturbed the lifetime of Pope; but this would have left him helpless, if a new "philosopher and friend" had not arrived in the person of the thick-skinned and blatant clergyman, William Warburton. This ambitious self-seeker came forward with an elaborate exposition of the "Essay," in which he was so successful that he was exalted to the rank of Pope's intimate friend

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for life. There was nothing that Pope in his gratitude would not do for Warburton ; and it is satisfactory to know that that sagacious gentleman reaped in a bishopric the full reward of his orthodox zeal. His officious friendship for Pope has resulted in the poet's works being encumbered with notes and expositions, which are only too often an excuse for advertising the commentator who, as a mass of undigested learning and a noisy windbag, would have adorned the dunces' throne at least as well as Cibber. At the same time, while—according to Pope's own admission—Warburton understood Pope's meaning better than he did himself, he has amid his fussy amplifications given us valuable notes on Pope's ideas and aims.

One thing he explained was the plan of the great moral poem of which the "Essay on Man" was to be the first part. Whether Pope really conceived such a plan clearly, we have already doubted ; certainly we have five poems, collectively known as the "Moral Essays," which Warburton described as a few of the detailed parts of a fourth book of the great design. They might have been coerced into such a service, if Pope had willed it. But as they stand they are satirical in their treatment, and only didactic in the second place. They may be spoken of as a contribution to a moral philosophy of man in the same way as any poem of human interest can be so described. But they are essentially personal poems, deriving their chief motive force from individual

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characters well known to Pope; and they contain some of Pope's most skilful portraiture. The attempt, however, to proceed from particular characters to general principles, which is certainly made in them, justified Warburton in associating them with the "Essay on Man"; and they may best be regarded as a link of transition between that purely general poem and the vivid individualism of the true satires that were to follow them.

The five "Moral Essays" which we have thus classified were written and published at various times, and did not receive their present arrangement until the complete edition of Pope's works was published after his death. The essay that now stands first in the series—that "Of the Knowledge and Characters of men"—appeared in 1733, and, as the date implies, is nearest in spirit to the "Essay on Man." The second, dedicated to a lady and dealing with the character of woman, did not see the light till 1735, although parts of it were certainly in existence earlier. The third epistle, addressed to Lord Bathurst, and entitled "Of the Use of Riches," came out in 1732; and the fourth, dealing with the same theme, in 1731. The last in order was the first in composition; it was occasioned by Pope's reading of Addison's essay on medals in the "Spectator," and was addressed to Addison in 1715, but not published until it was incorporated in a posthumous edition of Addison's works in 1720. The five essays written in this disjointed fashion could not have

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any more durable cement to bind them together than is to be found in the ~~nature of Pope~~ : they have such unity as that can give, but no more.

They contain many excellent passages and, of course, many happy lines ; but they do not seem, except here and there, to require special mention from us. They are good, but not, even in their own kind, supremely good. The treatment of the ~~use of wealth is trite~~, and in keeping with the ~~tone of the moral satirists of all ages~~ : Pope does not here rise to the lofty ethical levels of the best parts of the " Essay on Man," nor does he compel the distinction of originality. Nevertheless these general essays are very interesting and often stimulating reading, and occupy a good position among the ethical poetry of our literature.

The essay on the characters of women reveals Pope in his most bitterly satiric vein. Elsewhere Pope has developed his theory of the ruling passion in men, urging with much force that, once we have discovered what that is, we have the clue to any individual man. If this rough-and-ready notion is not pressed too far, it is a useful guide. Applying it to women, however, Pope reaches the following sweeping conclusion :

In Men, we various Ruling Passions find ;
In Women, two almost divide the kind ;
Those, only fix'd, they first or last obey,
The Love of Pleasure, and the Love of Sway.

Since his analysis of womanhood proceeds from

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such premises, we may expect from Pope some lively caricatures when he comes to practical applications. And it is evident that his view of the great women of his time was more than blurred by a complete contempt. There is no pretence to gallantry or even politeness. Pope falls upon his victims with the full force of his stinging whip. Duchesses and countesses are not spared ; they are treated with the same merciless malice as was distilled for the corrosion of Pope's masculine enemies ; and their portraits here rendered so luridly give us a very poor impression of eighteenth-century women. Evidently the sex did not treat Pope well. Perhaps the ladies were not equal to appreciating his wit ; but it is also likely that they made game of his deformity or, as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu did, of his pompous and ridiculous gallantries. Whatever the cause, the effect is here, in some of the most scathing lines ever devoted to the discomfiture of women. No tenderness and no tolerance enter to convert the satirist into the humorist.

To take a few examples. Rufa is not known for certain, but Sappho is Lady Mary : think, then, of the spirit which inspired the lines :

Rufa, whose eye, quick-glancing o'er the Park,
Attracts each light gay Meteor of a Spark,
Agrees as ill with Rufa studying Locke,
As Sappho's diamonds with her dirty smock ;
Or Sappho at her toilet's greasy task,
With Sappho fragrant at an evening masque.

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Or again :

See Sin in state, majestically drunk.

And again :

Flavia's a wit has too much sense to pray ;
To toast our wants and wishes is her way.

And still again :

" With every pleasing, every prudent part,
Say what can Chloe want ? "—She wants a Heart.
She speaks, behaves, and acts just as she ought ;
But never, never reached one generous Thought.
Virtue she finds too painful an endeavour,
Content to dwell in decencies for ever.

To know that Chloe was Lady Suffolk does not
make this picture more poignantly true to a type
that has surely survived Pope's days.

Pleasures the sex, as children Birds pursue,
Still out of reach, but never out of view ;

but how unwise they are ! Youth does not last
for ever, and—

See how the world its veterans rewards—
A youth of frolic, and an age of cards ;
Fair to no purpose, artful to no end,
Young without Lovers, old without a Friend ;
A Fop their Passion, but their Prize a Sot ;
Alive, ridiculous, and dead, forgot !

Could anything be more scathing ? And what
a lurid reflection it throws upon the " smart
set " of Pope's days !

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Some of the single lines of this essay have become almost proverbs ; and the devil's advocate against woman's cause would find here a full armoury of weapons. The first couplet is :

Nothing so true as what you once let fall,
" Most Women have no Characters at all."

Later on we read :

Men, some to Bus'ness, some to Pleasure, take ;
But every Woman is at heart a Rake ;
Men, some to Quiet, some to public Strife,
But every Woman would be Queen for life.

And toward the end we light upon one of Pope's best-known sayings :

And yet, believe me, good as well as ill,
Woman's at best a Contradiction still.

But the most famous passage in the poem is the magnificent characterization of the Duchess of Marlborough as Atossa. This passage had been written long before, and, it is said, shown to the great duchess as a portrait of her rival, the Duchess of Buckingham. But presumably the cap was seen to be fitting to her Grace of Marlborough, and it has been reported on confident authority that she paid Pope £1000 to suppress it. No higher compliment to the power of his satire could have been paid to the poet. But he never liked to destroy any of his work, least of all that which he had perfected with such

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elaborate care as he had given to this sketch of Atossa. He kept it therefore ; but in deference to the duchess (or to her £1000) did not let it appear in the " Moral Essays " during his lifetime. At the time of his death, however, he was editing a collected edition of his poems ; and it was found by his executors ~~that the character of Atossa had been included.~~ Hence this masterly portrait of one of the most famous women of her time was preserved to us ~~to adorn an ethical poem on the characters of women.~~ We give it entire.

~~But what~~ are these to great Atossa's mind ?
Scarce once herself, by turns all Womankind !
Who, with herself, or others, from her birth
Finds all her life one warfare upon earth :
Shines in exposing Knaves, and painting Fools,
Yet is, whate'er she hates and ridicules.
No thought advances, but her Eddy Brain
Whisks it about, and down it goes again.
Full sixty years the World has been her Trade,
The wisest Fool much Time has ever made.
From loveless youth to unrespected age,
No Passion gratify'd except her Rage.
So much the Fury still out-ran the Wit,
The Pleasure miss'd her, and the Scandal hit.
Who breaks with her, provokes Revenge from Hell,
But he's a bolder man who dares be well.
Her ev'ry turn with Violence pursu'd,
Nor more a storm her Hate than Gratitude :
To that each Passion turns, or soon or late ;
Love, if it makes her yield, must make her hate :
Superiors ? death ! and Equals ? what a curse !
But an Inferior not dependant ? worse.

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Offend her, and she knows not to forgive ;
Oblige her, and she'll hate you while you live :
But die, and she'll adore you—Then the Bust
And Temple rise—then fall again to dust.¹
Last night, her Lord was all that's good and great ;
A Knave this morning, and his Will a Cheat.
Strange ! by the Means defeated of the Ends,
By Spirit robb'd of Pow'r, by Warmth of Friends,
By Wealth of Follow'rs ! without one distress
Sick of herself thro' very selfishness !

VIII

THE "Moral Essays" had strengthened the impression laid by "The Dunciad," that it was in satire that Pope's chief strength lay. While he is dealing with general ethical truths Pope is commonplace and rarely stimulating ; when the opportunity for a personal portrait enters we seem to feel the quiver of his nerves, all a-tremble with excitement ; and whether the portrait is inspired by friendly or (as is more usual) by unfriendly motives it is generally vital, and, if incomplete, it rarely fails to touch the quick in some shrewd stroke. In his later years, therefore, the poet devoted himself entirely to the cultivation of this satiric faculty. He became the Horace of his day.

With some justice Pope's epoch is often described as the Augustan age of English

¹ The Duchess erected a temple to the memory of Queen Anne, with a bust of the Queen in it, which mouldered away in a few years.

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literature, owing to certain resemblances to the great period of Latin literature at the commencement of the Christian era. A similar tone prevailed in society in the two periods. We see in each the same lack of lofty national spirit, the same absorption in mean ideals, the same loss of vivid faith. Each was an age of criticism, of cold scepticism not yet brave enough to declare itself. Literature and philosophy were the foibles of the fashionable, and the staple of discussion among the intellectual epicures of the age. The patron and the politician were united in a Halifax, as in a Mæcenas, and there was ample material for the satirist in the ethical standards of the prominent men of either epoch. Thus Pope stands toward the reigns of the first Georges as Horace stood to the reign of Augustus; his was the highest note that was heard in contemporary literature. It was a happy inspiration of Bolingbroke's, therefore, that set Pope translating the first satire of the second book of Horace in the year 1733. The task was so obviously congenial that it was accomplished in a few days. It was followed by the second satire in 1734, and by three of the epistles between 1735 and 1738; the whole, provided with a prologue and an epilogue, appear in Pope's works under the appropriate title of "Imitations of Horace."

Imitations they are, and not translations. Pope has followed the general lines of the thought of his original and was obviously dependent on Horace for these. But he has cleverly adapted

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the illustrations to his own day ; he has made use of the opportunity to reveal many of the intimate facts and deeper aims of his personal life ; and only in the broadest spirit has he adopted his prototype's attitude toward life. The genial pessimism and the contemplative melancholy of the Roman poet find no echo in Pope. Nor could his ethical interests be the same as those of Horace. The latter lived at a time when all that had been vital in Roman beliefs was in a state of decay and degeneration which promised no hope of recovery, and under such conditions satire was the only weapon that morality could effectively employ. But Pope was a Catholic who certainly did not regard his religion as decrepit or effete ; his satirical criticism of life, therefore, could not have so deep an inspiration as that of Horace ; it is, comparatively, superficial : strong in personalities, but weak in the general applications. Pope becomes most like Horace when his subject is himself.

Yet, though the imitations fall short of their model in depth and breadth, they represent the best work of their kind in English. They are the work of the poet at his ripest and best, his final exercises on an instrument to which he had devoted for a quarter of a century continuous care and attention, backed up by an unrivalled aptitude for language and an exceptional gift of expression. The moral reflections are admittedly trite ; but there can be no doubt about the brilliancy of the jewels that repose in the

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sober setting. No one who can appreciate an exquisite skill in the use of words should miss reading these satires and epistles. They sharpen the wits more keenly than anything else in our literature. While they give us no thrilling sense of the soaring grandeur of the human mind ; while they never invite our souls to aspiring thoughts or heroic flights in the Infinite—they do show us a singularly alert and athletic intellect, performing its graceful gymnastics with an ease and finish that are a delight to witness. It is true that Pope's wisdom is of the earth earthy ; it is true that he cannot teach us much about luxury or temperance, for example, that the man of the world with common sense for his standard cannot follow ; but the faculty that coins such lines as Pope's best must not be neglected or scorned by those who would know what literature can do. Four lines taken at random show how prevalent are the examples of this gift of Pope's :

True, conscious Honour is to feel no sin,
He's armed without that's innocent within ;
Be this thy Screen, and this thy Wall of Brass ;
Compar'd to this, a Minister's an Ass.

Here is the skill in aphorism ; here, for those who would look it out, a clear imitation of Horace ; here a sly hint at Walpole and his corrupt servants : all done with a neat perfection that is beyond admiration. And similar examples are numerous.

We shall not attempt here the analysis of each

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satire in detail : it must suffice to indicate the kind of matter they contain by a few illustrative examples. They have in the main three broad lines of interest. In the first place they reveal with sufficient fullness Pope's character, as it was seen by himself ; secondly, they throw real light on the lives of his most eminent contemporaries from King George and Walpole, downward ; and, finally, they contain the highest culture of their day, the most advanced thought current among the clever men of the time. The best of them in all respects is the Prologue, addressed to the poet's friend, Dr. Arbuthnot, recently dead ; it is entitled to special treatment as, on the whole, the most characteristic product of Pope's genius, affording us the fullest insight into his aims and personality. Leaving that for the present, we give a few passages from the remaining satires.

Often enough does Pope insist on his claim that virtue alone is the motive force of his satire. In his first attempt we find the following vigorous lines :

What ? arm'd for Virtue when I point the pen,
Brand the bold front of shameless guilty men ;
Dash the proud Gamester in his gilded Car ;
Bare the mean Heart that lurks beneath a Star ;
Can there be wanting, to defend Her cause,
Lights of the Church, or Guardians of the Laws ?
Could pension'd Boileau¹ lash in honest strain
Flatt'ers and Bigots ev'n in Louis' reign ?

¹ A French poet of the classical school, whose "Le Lutrin" and "Satires" are very strongly in Pope's vein.

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Could Laureate Dryden Pimp and Friar engage,
 Yet neither Charles nor James be in a rage ?
 And I not strip the gilding off a knave,
 Unplac'd, unpension'd,¹ no man's heir, or slave ?
 I will, or perish in the gen'rous cause :
 Hear this, and tremble ! you, who 'scape the Laws.
 Yes, while I live, no rich or noble knave
 Shall walk the World, in credit, to his grave.
 To Virtue only and her friends a Friend,
 The World beside may murmur, or commend.
 Know, all the distant din that world can keep,
 Rolls o'er my Grotto, and but soothes my sleep.
 There, my retreat the best Companions grace,
 Chiefs out of war, and Statesmen out of place.
 There St. John² mingles with my friendly bowl
 The Feast of Reason and the Flow of Soul :
 And He,³ whose lightning pierc'd th' Iberian Lines,
 Now forms my Quincunx,⁴ and now ranks my Vines,
 Or tames the Genius of the stubborn plain,
 Almost as quickly as he conquer'd Spain.

Thus he claims that his satire is doing the work
 that the Church and the Law ought to do. He
 is proud that neither place nor pension dims his
 direct glance into the face of virtue ; proud too
 that he need not and does not truckle to the
 rich and noble ; yet proud also that he numbers
 such as Bolingbroke and Peterborough among
 his intimate friends.

The same pride inspires also the following

¹ Pope was offered a pension by Lord Halifax in the reign of George I, but declined it.

² Bolingbroke lived near Pope, at Dawley, from 1725 to 1735.

³ The Earl of Peterborough.

⁴ An arrangement of trees in fives: four forming the sides, and the other the centre, of a square.

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passage in the epilogue to the satires, written in the form of a dialogue between the poet and a friend (1738).

P. Ask you what Provocation I have had ?
The strong Antipathy of Good to Bad.
When Truth or Virtue an Affront endures,
Th' Affront is mine, my friend, and should be yours.
Mine as a Foe profess'd to false Pretence,
Who think a Coxcomb's Honour like his Sense ;
Mine, as a Friend to ev'ry worthy mind ;
And mine as Man, who feel for all mankind.

F. You're strangely proud.

<i>P.</i>	So proud, I am no Slave :	}
	So impudent, I own myself no Knave :	
	So odd, my Country's Ruin makes me grave.	
	Yes, I am proud ; I must be proud to see	
	Men not afraid of God, afraid of me :	
	Safe from the Bar, the Pulpit, and the Throne,	
	Yet touch'd and sham'd by Ridicule alone.	

We have mentioned Pope's religion, and he is not ashamed of it, but boasts rather that he was a Papist and his father a Non-juror who suffered the various penalties of their faith. This boast is no doubt effective ; but elsewhere he describes his faith more accurately. Thus in the first epistle he expresses himself a lover of moderation, and this is doubtless his real aim, the Catholic emerging only under provocation.

But ask not, to what Doctors I apply ?
Sworn to no Master, of no Sect am I :
As drives the storm, at any door I knock :
And house with Montaigne now, or now with Locke.

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Sometimes a Patriot, active in debate,
Mix with the World, and battle for the State,
Free as young Lyttelton,¹ her Cause pursue,
Still true to Virtue, and as warm as true :
Sometimes with Aristippus, or St. Paul,
Indulge my candor, and grow all to all ;
Back to my native Moderation slide,
And win my way by yielding to the tide.

In the first of the satires too he expresses the same claim to moderation, which his life on the whole justifies.

Papist or Protestant, or both between,
Like good Erasmus in an honest Mean,
In moderation placing all my glory,
While Tories call me Whig and Whigs a Tory.

Pope's estimate of himself did not err on the side of modesty, and there is no confession of his weaknesses. Most pleasant are his references to his home life and to his parents. His virtue and his independence demand a firm and strenuous assertion ; the lines on his mother, who died at the age of ninety-three in 1733, are tenderly just and genuine.

That Pope's satire was bold enough to run amôk among the greatest of the land is evident from that masterpiece of irony, the first epistle, dedicated to George II. The Horatian original had Augustus for its figure-head ; but the

¹ Lord Lyttelton, as a favourite of the Prince of Wales and an opponent of Walpole, was a friend of Pope. He was the author of various theological and philosophical works.

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Roman emperor was a real patron of letters, while George II scarcely knew the difference between prose and verse. The ironical flattery of Pope's address to the uncultured king is amazingly clever ; no finer or more deadly irony can be found ; and for the mind suitably equipped with literary instinct and historical knowledge the epistle is a continuous joy. We must find room for two short passages :

My Liege ! why Writers little claim your thought,
I guess ; and, with their leave, will tell the fault :
We Poets are (upon a Poet's word)
Of all mankind, the creatures most absurd :
The season, when to come, and when to go,
To sing, or cease to sing, we never know ;
And if we will recite nine hours in ten,
You lose your patience, just like other men.
Then too we hurt ourselves, when to defend
A single verse, we quarrel with a friend ;
Repeat unask'd ; lament, the Wit's too fine
For vulgar eyes, and point out ev'ry line.
But most, when straining with too weak a wing,
We needs will write Epistles to the King ;
And from the moment we oblige the town,
Expect a place, or pension from the Crown ;
Or dubb'd Historians, by express command,
T' enroll your Triumphs o'er the seas and land,
Be call'd to Court to plan some work divine,
As once for Louis, Boileau and Racine.

.

Oh ! could I mount on the Mæonian wing,
Your arms, your Actions, your repose to sing !
What seas you travers'd, and what fields you fought !
Your Country's Peace, how oft, how dearly bought !

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How barb'rous rage subsided at your word,
And Nations wonder'd while they dropp'd the sword !
How, when you nodded, o'er the land and deep,
Peace stole her wing, and wrapt the world in sleep ;
'Till earth's extremes your mediation own,
And Asia's Tyrants tremble at your Throne—
But Verse, alas ! your Majesty disdains ;
And I'm not us'd to Panegyric strains :
The Zeal of Fools offends at any time,
But most of all, the Zeal of Fools in rhyme.
Besides, a fate attends on all I write,
That when I aim at praise, they say I bite.
A vile Encomium doubly ridicules :
There's nothing blackens like the ink of fools.
If true, a woeful likeness ; and if lies,
“ Praise undeserv'd is scandal in disguise.”

Walpole escapes fairly lightly, owing, it is said, to a favour conferred by him on Pope's former tutor, the priest Southcote. Nevertheless the following lines cannot be called complimentary :

See Sir Robert !—hum—
And never laugh—for all my life to come ?
Seen him I have, but in his happier hour
Of social Pleasure, ill-exchang'd for Pow'r ;
Seen him, uncumber'd with the Venal tribe,
Smile without Art, and win without a Bribe.
Would he oblige me ? let me only find,
He does not think me what he thinks mankind.
Come, come, at all I laugh he laughs, no doubt ;
The only diff'rence is I dare laugh out.

The “ Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot,” which forms the prologue to the satires, is the richest of all

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in the general merits of Pope's verse. It is in the form of a dialogue in which Arbuthnot plays the part of the friendly counsellor and raises the curtain for Pope to publish to the world his defence for his career. And if the most effective defence is vigorous attack, we have it here in the superlative degree. It is bitter to the last degree in parts ; for example, in the characterization of Addison previously quoted (p. 39) and in the following crushing blow to Lord Hervey ¹ :

Let Sporus¹ tremble.—*A.* What ? that thing of silk,
Sporus, that mere white curd of Ass's milk ?
Satire or sense, alas ! can Sporus feel ?
Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel ?

P. Yet let me flap this bug with gilded wings,
This painted child of dirt that stinks and stings ;

and so on, in the same vein, for a further score of lines. Pope never infused a more condensed gall into his verses than in these lines, unless it is in the terrible malice of the references to the hack Gildon and to hapless Dennis :

Soft were my numbers ; who could take offence
While pure Description ² held the place of Sense ?
Like gentle Fanny's ³ was my flow'ry theme,
A painted mistress, or a purling stream.⁴

¹ Lord Hervey, son of the Earl of Bristol, and a friend of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. He held office under Walpole ; but how he first offended Pope is uncertain. Pope referred with more than his customary venom to this same victim in "The Dunciad" and in the "Imitations of Horace."

² Referring to his *Pastorals*.

³ Lord Hervey, see note above.

⁴ Here he refers to the "Rape of the Lock" and "Windsor Forest" respectively.

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Yet then did Gildon ¹ draw his venal quill ;—
I wished the man a dinner, and sat still.
Yet then did Dennis ² rave in furious fret ;—
I never answered,—I was not in debt.

Well might Arbuthnot ask

But why insult the poor, affront the great ?

The answer, however, is ready :

A Knave's a Knave to me in ev'ry state :
Alike my scorn, if he succeed or fail,
Sporus at court or Japhet in a jail.

And, earlier in the poem, when Arbuthnot is made to suggest a milder course, Pope exclaims :

Out with it, Dunciad ! let the secret pass,
That secret to each fool, that he's an Ass :

.

You think this cruel ? take it for a rule
No creature smarts so little as a fool.

It is in this spirit, that the fool and the impostor are too thick-skinned to feel his lash, that Pope takes up and crushes his enemies one by one, as though they were mere noxious insects.

¹ Charles Gildon, an inferior critic and playwright, who had abused Pope in print on several occasions.

² John Dennis was a critic and pamphleteer who first roused the wrath of Pope by a violent but not wholly stupid criticism of the "Essay on Criticism." Dennis obscured his real merits by his malice and violence, and was pursued by Pope unrelentingly throughout his life.

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Nevertheless, he is anxious to plead that all is done in the service of virtue :

Curst be the verse, how well soe'er it flow,
That tends to make one worthy man my foe.

In an interesting personal passage he tells Arbuthnot that he wrote because the poetic gift was instinct in him, and in order to make the life that the physician had preserved productive of something which should be worthy of his trouble.

Why did I write ? what sin to me unknown
Dipt me in ink, my parents', or my own ?
As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,
I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came.
I left no calling for this idle trade,
No duty broke, no father disobey'd.
The Muse but serv'd to ease some friend, not Wife,
To help me thro' this long disease, my Life,
To second, Arbuthnot ! thy Art and Care,
And teach the Being you preserved, to bear.

At another point, however, he complains that people make too much fuss over his writings and cannot conceive that he has no ulterior purposes to serve by them. Life, not poetry, is his first consideration.

Oh let me live my own, and die so too !
(To live and die is all I have to do :)
Maintain a Poet's dignity and ease,
And see what friends, and read what books I please ;
Above a Patron, tho' I condescend
Sometimes to call a minister my friend.

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I was not born for Courts or great affairs ;
I pay my debts, believe, and say my pray'rs ;
Can sleep without a Poem in my head ;
Nor know, if Dennis be alive or dead.

Why am I ask'd what next shall see the light ?
Heav'ns ! was I born for nothing but to write ?
Has Life no joys for me ? or, (to be grave)
Have I no friend to serve, no soul to save ?
" I found him close with Swift "—" Indeed ? no
doubt,"

(Cries prating Balbus) " something will come out."
'Tis all in vain, deny it as I will.

" No, such a Genius never can lie still ; "

And then for mine obligingly mistakes
The first Lampoon Sir Will¹ or Bubo² makes.
Poor guiltless I ! and can I choose but smile,
When ev'ry Coxcomb knows me by my Style ?

The passage which we have previously quoted (p. 18) from this poem is, however, Pope's most formal and memorable picture of himself. It is a piece of special pleading and, consequently, over-flattering. Pope's ways manly !—the cynic may well exclaim in derision. Yet on the whole the portrait must pass, and thus justify Pope's life-work. A man, even though he be a poet, is entitled to be heard in his own defence ; it is not fair to measure him with his enemy's rods, nor is it wise to accept unquestioned the zeal of too-officious friends. Pope's estimate of himself is unmistakably interesting, and his expression of

¹ Sir William Yonge, a prominent supporter of Walpole.

² Bubb Doddington, a typical eighteenth-century gentleman, a patron of literature and man of fashion. He has been restored to notice by Browning in his " Parleyings with certain people of importance in their day.

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his ideals, as will be perceived, is of striking force.

And, after all, the ideal embodied in that statement of his personal position was no bad one for a satirist. Doubtless, in practice, Pope did not maintain it in its purity. Well—he was human, with his full dower of human frailty. But his most notable defect was his lack of a true sense of humour. Had that divine gift brought “sweetness and light” to tone down the force and lucidity of his satire, how great would this have been! As Sir Leslie Stephen has well pointed out, he was too near the standpoint of his victims; keenly as he was conscious of their defects, he could not remove himself so far from them as to view them with the eyes of the angels. In the “Epistle to Arbuthnot,” as in all the satires, there is much indignation, plenty of wrath and of spleen, torrents of scorn and ridicule, a liberal shower of moral truths: but we miss the tragic pity, the heart-deep sadness over the spectacle, which humour would have brought with itself, and which lift even the fierce misanthropy of “Gulliver’s Travels” into the higher spheres, whence we may gain a fuller and larger vision.

IX

SIX years of life remained to Pope after the publication of the epilogue to the satires; but although his intellectual powers remained as bright and brilliant as ever, the only poetic fruit of them was the fourth

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book of "The Dunciad" and the unfortunate revision of that poem which he made in 1741. He spent much time in the preparation of new editions of his works; but his health, never good, was fast becoming very serious. At fifty he was an old man, fretful, irritable, morbidly sensitive in body and spirit. He was carefully tended by the devoted Martha Blount, to whom he showed an affectionate gratitude, full of the tenderness of feeling which is the pleasing obverse of his general infirmity. He was happy in the society of a few friends, chief of whom was that ill-assorted couple, Bolingbroke and Warburton, the one inspiring his thoughts and the other explaining their meaning to him. His wonderful mind triumphed heroically over his physical weaknesses; he held his own to the end; and it is pleasant to dwell upon the picture of the invalid poet, in the intervals of bodily disorder, flashing his wit and pronouncing his ethical judgments in brilliant sentences, while his friends hang upon his words, as if they were arrow-flights of highest wisdom. One Joseph Spence, who was with him much during these latter years, has left behind him a series of anecdotes which do much to take the tarnish from the poet's memory. They show us, not merely the acute intellect, but also the devoted son, the loyal friend, the nobler interest in moral problems, that lay behind Pope's equivocal outer life.

Unfortunately, one example of his incredible littleness remains to be mentioned. In 1726 the

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piratical bookseller Curll, a man of unscrupulous character, managed to obtain, and hence to print, some of Pope's letters to his early friend, Henry Cromwell. Naturally Pope was annoyed because, although the letters did him no discredit as a young man, they were written in an exaggerated and turgid style, and contained sentiments of which, as the literary dictator of his time, his vanity made him ashamed. A carefully concocted revenge upon Curll naturally followed. But a few years later, in an edition of Wycherley's works, other letters of his appeared ; and this prompted him to take action to get an authorized edition of all his letters published.

He had, during the whole period of their friendship, maintained a regular correspondence with Swift in Ireland, and had devoted much care both to the style and to the sentiments of these letters. They seemed to him to be too good to be lost ; they seemed also to offer a convenient method of gratifying his grudge against Curll, and to provide a source of profit and fame for himself. By discreditable trickery he therefore obtained the collection of his letters from the unwilling Swift, whose mind and memory were by that time failing. He had also obtained other letters from his other correspondents ; and by a series of very paltry manœuvres he contrived that a collection of these letters should fall into the hands of Curll, who issued his volume in 1735. No one but Pope could have supplied the materials for this publication ;

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but at once he started an outcry against it. An action in the House of Lords served to advertise the grievance still further, but did not lead to the suppression of the volume. What could Pope now do—the hapless victim of grasping and unscrupulous publishers—except issue the correspondence to the world, as he would have it appear? If the public is to see his letters at all—which Heaven forbid!—at least they shall see them in a correct and authorized form. Thus did Pope justify his issue of the letters in 1737. It is a miserable story—the more miserable when the details of the whole intrigue are minutely examined. The morbid vanity of the man, who was anxious to have his letters exposed to the world, but was at the same time anxious that it should appear that the publication was against his wish, must tempt his most sympathetic admirers to rather cynical reflections.

This temptation becomes stronger when we learn that the correspondence was badly garbled in his own interests. His friend Caryll, in returning the many letters he had received, took the trouble, unknown to Pope, of making copies of them; and these copies were discovered more than a century later. They disclose the fact that Pope had manipulated his letters with great dexterity, so as to show himself up in the most favourable light, literary and moral. Of course he had the right to do this much; but his treatment was more drastic than can be justified; he tampered with the facts, in order to give a

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totally false impression both of himself and of his opinions. The result is that the letters are never reliable when they refer to definite facts of the poet's life or when they commit themselves to any definite statement about his conduct or career. Pope in short turned them into literary compositions pure and simple ; and it is as such that they must be judged.

From this point of view they are disappointing. The fine qualities of his verse—its terseness, its incisive shrewdness, its sheer cleverness—are absent. The poet struts about on literary and moral stilts, and his movements are often absurd and always awkward. The style of Pope's letters is as artificial as their subject-matter is vapid and commonplace. They have the first deadly sin of a personal letter—affectation. They are the prose of a great man, advertising and trying to live up to his greatness. The letters to ladies are the worst of all in their false tone and assumed gallantry. It would be difficult to find, lurking anywhere in the large volume, a gleam of Gray's cultured humour or Cowper's unaffected simplicity. The letters of Swift, and a few of those of Arbuthnot, which appeared with Pope's, are better, because more direct and more natural, than either Pope's or Bolingbroke's. Nevertheless, with all its faults, the whole body of correspondence is intensely interesting. Its affectation is akin to the powdered wig of the period, and as characteristic of the time. Few volumes exist which throw so clear a light upon a state of society now

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vanished. Its failings are the failings of the men who led the intellectual fashion of the first half of the eighteenth century.

A few lines from one of the letters to Bolingbroke, dated September 3, 1740, will illustrate Pope's general tone. Doubtless it is perfectly honest flattery ; but the language of the compliment is extravagant and desultory, not reminding us of the poetry in a single particular.

My dear Lord,

Your every word is kind to me, and all the openings of your mind amiable. Your communicating any of your sentiments both makes me a happier and a better man : there is so true a fund of all virtue, public and social, within you,—I mean so right a sense of things as we stand related to each other by the laws of God, and indebted to each other in conformity to those laws, that I hope no particular calamity can swallow up your care and concern for the general . . .

It is almost incredible that this sloppy prose is the work of the brilliant poet who had been the acknowledged leader of literary taste for more than twenty years. For Pope now occupied undisputed the uncrowned presidency in the republic of letters, and ruled his free realm with almost absolute dictatorship. He was the arbiter of poetic taste ; the standard of correctness set forth by him was accepted without demur by the younger generation of writers ; and the heroic couplet was applied to all and every use. It is pleasing to know that Pope gave encouragement to Thomson, the author of " The Seasons,"

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and to Young, the author of "Night Thoughts," and that he also commended Johnson's "London," issued in 1738. He was, with the fullest sincerity, an enthusiast for good literature, and no man was more generous or more discerning than he in sifting good from bad. He estimated with equal justice the descriptive writing of Thomson and the satire of Young and Johnson, different as these were from his own work ; and his approval was the most valued of any praise that a new writer could receive.

Truly Pope had triumphed in his strenuous battle. He had, in the face of ill-health and of bitter prejudices, reached his dizzy pinnacle of literary power. His enemies—the charlatan and the Philistine—skulked in their holes, or submitted to his supremacy. Great men feared him : a very Walpole shielded himself against the vitriol of his ridicule. And a circle of worthy friends listened to his dying precepts. Like Socrates, he died dispensing his morality to his friends. Bolingbroke was moved to tears as he reflected upon the imminent severance of a thirty-year-long comradeship. Religion and immortality were frequent themes of these last days, and the poet declared his faith in both with the utmost fervour. He received the last sacrament of the Church to which he had been faithful throughout his life ; and on May 30, 1744, he died, so quietly and peacefully that the exact moment could not be observed. It was an end worthy of a philosopher ; the fret and fume of a stormy life were lulled into a noble serenity at the last.

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Pope was quietly buried at Twickenham, near the graves of his parents. On the monument which he erected to them he had written the simple epitaph, *Parentibus bene merentibus filius fecit* ; by his will was added no more than *et sibi*. Nothing in his life became Pope better than his manner of leaving it.

Quarrels were soon to break out, long before the turf began to grow upon his grave. Bolingbroke was to become one of the slanderers of his memory, and the bludgeon of Warburton—"the most impudent man living," in Bolingbroke's opinion—was almost broken in defence of his friend. Over these unseemly bickerings we may best draw a veil ; they were only too closely in keeping with the events of the poet's life. When a generation had past, a state of equilibrium between his morals and his talents was found by Johnson in his "Lives of the Poets" (1781). Pope has never had a biographer more sagacious and more tolerant, and no student of Pope should ignore the verdict of one who lived in the shadow of Pope's literary greatness and had, if any man ever had, the right to chastise his moral obliquities.

And what is to be our final opinion of the man and of the poet ? Surely in regard to the man it must be one of pity for the physical and moral infirmities that entailed so much suffering ; of admiration for the heroism that enabled him to achieve so much great work against enormous odds ; and of gratitude to the writer who, in a subservient and corrupt age, held proudly to the

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pennon of independence. Pope did for literature what the Revolution and Walpole did for our politics ; he gave it order and good government ; and although the methods of "The Dunciad" do not altogether please, like those of Walpole in the wider sphere, we must forgive the one as we forgive the other—looking to the good they did and remembering the state of things with which they had to fight and work. It is as useless and as unjust to condemn Walpole because he was not a Gladstone as to dismiss Pope because he has not the manners and methods of a Tennyson.

For Pope was exactly the poet his age required. That age had neither the simplicity nor the heroism needed to produce great epic poetry ; it had not the *joie de vivre* that generates a vital drama ; nor had it the exultant emotion or the heart-deep sadness from which great outbursts of the lyric muse most often spring. What remains for the poet of such a dull and prosaic epoch but didactic or satirical verse ? And in these branches of poetry, Pope is easily supreme among English poets. Dryden, a greater poet on the whole, cannot challenge Pope in this field ; and if Dryden cannot, no other poet can. Thus Pope is one of the most successful of our poets, if we measure success by the ratio between aims and achievements. He tilled with unwavering perseverance one plot of ground, and the harvest is a splendid crop of the seeds he cultivated. The soil nurtured by a Shakespeare, a Milton or a Wordsworth, a Chaucer, Spenser or Shelley,

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was doubtless more genial to the finer flowers of poetry than Pope's. The more graceful forms, the most delicate fragrances, are absent from his dry and unornamental crop. But qualities of solid and substantial virtue remain. Are they merely, as Matthew Arnold would have it, the qualities of prose? Are Pope's verses no more than splendid rhetoric, and not poetry at all?

That Pope's language is everywhere the obedient servant of the sense he wished to convey, the extracts we have given abundantly prove. But it is an idle bandying of words to deny it the force of imagination as well. If "The Rape of the Lock," and the best passages of the satires and epistles are not imaginative, it is difficult to give a meaning to that word. And what else is needed to convert metre into poetry? In ethical and didactic poetry those romantic excesses which charm in a "Faerie Queene" and those mysterious melodies which accompany a Shelley's flights would be alike inappropriate. In place of them we should seek hints and touches of another kind. Spenser and Shelley draw their delight from imaginative suggestions suitable to their subjects, and the ethical poet must do the same. Now Pope's verse is surely full of expressions, phrases, words, which owe their value to their suggestiveness, rather than to the exact meaning they afford. His subject is, mainly, human nature, as it could be observed and interpreted under the conditions of the eighteenth century; and the pleasure we derive

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from his poems is dependent upon our reading sympathetically with him, upon our acuteness in perceiving the fine touches, the delicate shades of character—what we may call the dainty innuendoes—which reflect light upon his theme. There are those who find Spenser a bore ; others to whom Shelley is but a film of meaningless vapour. Such persons simply lack one or more of the finest human faculties. So those who will have Pope no poet similarly seem to lack another, perhaps lower, gift—the gift of imaginative intellectual perception. Pope's brain worked quite as much by the incalculable processes of intuition as by those of rational analysis. If his versification was mainly mechanical, the thought which he has embalmed in his carefully manufactured lines sprang often fiery hot from his imagination—flashed from his soul like the sparks which leap from a steel-stricken pavement beneath the dint of friction. Does not this entitle him to the poet's name ? Perhaps the friction was too frequently a needful excitation to his muse ; but we may also inquire whether " Paradise Lost " or " Prometheus Unbound," for example, if there had been no exciting friction with the outer world, would have been what they are. It is in the end the principle of beauty that reigns over the verse of Pope ; its presence does not diffuse the atmosphere of mystery and wonder, the glory of music and colour, that we find in greater poets ; but, in spite of false taste, in spite of an incomplete conception of the nature of classic verse, Pope has left us very much for

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our delight along with much more for our admiration. His faults are more obvious than his virtues ; but they are not therefore greater or stronger. He has flaunted his petty quarrels in our faces ; that must not make us overlook the fact that his immortal portraits—Sporus, Bufo, Atossa, Sappho, and the rest—are human types as well as personal enemies of Pope. Nor must we forget, in dwelling upon the personalities, that Pope's main inspirations came from his devotion to literature as such, his righteous anger at seeing it prostrated to hireling causes, his contempt for all pretentiousness, in any shape whatever. To one who has done so much for the dignity and reputation of pure literature, and who has brought the abiding principles of morals into her service, gratitude is the smallest alms that we can give.

We shall conclude this brief sketch with the closing lines of the " Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot." The passage refers to his parents and to his friend, and no one can deny it sincerity and tenderness, as well as cleverness ; in the fine finish of the lines there is assuredly a grace and ease which is like the conduct of a well-bred man, and has its own beauty, though the beauty is not perfectly spontaneous.

Of gentle blood (part shed in Honour's cause,
While yet in Britain Honour had applause)

Each parent sprung— *A.* What fortune, pray ?—

P. Their own,

And better got, than Bestia's ¹ from the throne.

¹ A Roman proconsul who in the war with Jugurtha was disgraced for bribery. The reference seems to be to Marlborough.

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Born to no Pride, inheriting no Strife,
 Nor marrying Discord in a noble wife,¹
 Stranger to civil and religious rage,
 The good man walk'd innoxious thro' his age.
 Nor Courts he saw, no suits would ever try,
 Nor dar'd an Oath, nor hazarded a Lie.²
 Un-learn'd, he knew no schoolman's subtle art,
 No language, but the language of the heart.
 By Nature honest, by Experience wise,
 Healthy by temp'rance, and by exercise ;
 His life, tho' long, to sickness past unknown,
His death was instant, and without a groan.
 O grant me, thus to live, and thus to die !
 Who sprung from Kings shall know less joy than I.
 O Friend ! may each domestic bliss be thine !
 Be no unpleasing Melancholy mine :
 Me, let the tender office long engage,
 To rock the cradle of reposing Age,
 With lenient arts extend a Mother's breath,
 Make Languor smile, and smooth the bed of Death,
 Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,
 And keep a while one parent from the sky !
 On cares like these if length of days attend,
 May Heav'n, to bless those days, preserve my friend,
 Preserve him social, cheerful, and serene,
 And just as rich as when he serv'd a Queen.³
 A. Whether that blessing be deny'd or giv'n,
 Thus far was right, the rest belongs to Heav'n.

¹ In reference to Addison's marriage with the Countess of Warwick.

² Pope's father was a Nonjuror.

³ Arbuthnot had been physician to Queen Anne.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following books will be useful to students who wish to pursue the study of Pope :

The standard edition of Pope is that of Elwin and Courthope, in ten volumes, including a Biography and the Correspondence.

A good cheap edition of the Original Poems is the Globe Edition (Macmillan : 3s. 6d.), edited by A. W. Ward.

The Translations of Homer may be obtained in the " World's Classics " series.

A good critical sketch of the poet's life is that by Sir Leslie Stephen (" English Men of Letters " : 2s.)

Johnson's " Life of Pope " is also good.

Courthope's " History of English Poetry," vol. v.

(Macmillan : 10s.), should be consulted for a sympathetic estimate of Pope's position in Literature.

Useful general works on the Literature of the period are :

" The Cambridge History of English Literature," vol. ix.

" The Age of Pope," by John Dennis (Bell).

" Eighteenth Century Literature," by Edmund Gosse (Macmillan).

" The Story of English Literature," vol. ii, by E. W. Edmunds (Murray).

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